

12-2001

## JAEPL, Vol. 7, Winter 2001-2002

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### Recommended Citation

Calendrillo, Editor, Linda T. and Fleckenstein, Editor, Kristie S. (2001) "JAEPL, Vol. 7, Winter 2001-2002," *The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*: Vol. 7 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl/vol7/iss1/1>

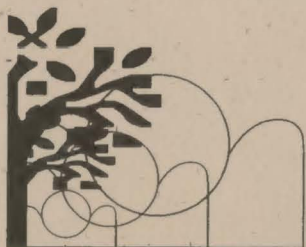
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### Cover Page Footnote

Berman, Morris. *The Reenchantment of the World*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981. Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes toward History*. Boston: Beacon, 1937. — *Definition of Man*. *Language as Social Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966. 3-24. — *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1950.



J A E P L

*The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*

**Sense-able Teaching:  
Engagement in the Literacy Classroom**

**Volume 7 • Winter 2001-2002**

# The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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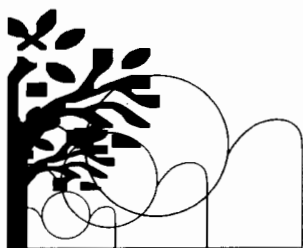
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JAEPL is a nonprofit journal published yearly by the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning with support from Western Kentucky University and Ball State University. JAEPL gratefully acknowledges this support as well as that of its manuscript readers.

Logo Design: Ann and Kip Strasma



J A E P L

*The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*

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Indexed with *MLA Bibliography*

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## Editors' Message

Morris Berman tells the story of his maternal grandfather, who, when he was five years old in the early 1880's, was sent to a Jewish elementary school in Belorussia. On the first day of class, the teacher startled the young boy by taking each child's slate and smearing the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet—*aleph* and *beys*—on it in honey. His grandfather's first lesson consisted of eating the letters off the slate. The symbolism of this act is complex, Berman muses, but central to the ritual is the belief that what is real must be taken into oneself, ingested: "we literally eat the other, take it into our guts, and as a result are changed by it" (267-68).

A similar, although usually unspoken, belief continues to weave through literacy teaching in this century, in this country. Writing and reading, both acts of rhetoric, involve "communication by the signs of consubstantiality, the appeal of identification," Kenneth Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, and identification is "hardly other than a name for the function of sociality" (*Attitudes* 144). The quintessential word man who saw in language the poetic function of making, resonating to the original sense of the term *poiesis*, Burke tied our language and our making to our bodies. We are, after all, symbol-using animals, a definition that gives equal weight to body and language ("Definition" 3-9). The lure of language is that it offers us the means to bridge our separations from one another; we can become consubstantial, of one substance. We can engage, and through that engagement we can write and read for "tolerance and contemplation" (*Rhetoric* xv).

The seven articles in this issue honor the call of engagement, of identification for "tolerance and contemplation," through sense-able teaching: teaching with the senses to the senses.

We open with W. Keith Duffy who, in "Imperfection: The Will-to-Control and the Struggle of Letting Go," finds in a spiritual balance the ability to embrace the "essential role of imperfection" in the writing classroom. By engaging with our paradoxical and mixed-up natures, we can unite in meaningful ways.

Randall Popken in "Felt Sensing of Speech Acts in Written Genre Acquisition" explores the necessary engagement of student writer and multiple texts as a means to evolve a felt sense of a new genre. Drawing on Eugene Gendlin's concept of felt sense, Popken traces the connection between the development of a physical, tacit sense of genre knowledge and the development of rhetorical expertise in that genre.

While Popken shapes the growth of rhetorical expertise, Carolina Mancuso shapes the rhetorical value of growing pains in "Teacher Growing Pains." By acknowledging and attending to "growing pains," what Dewey calls the "travail of thought" required to evolve a new perspective, readers and writers can grow in "wholeness individually and in community," Mancuso argues.

The sense of growing into new thinking by allowing it to enter our souls is the focus of Dennis Young's "A Poetics of Student Writing." The "poetics" of Young's title refers to the "soul-making, aesthetic dimension of student writing," a process that can be enacted only when we are actively involved with the mak-



ing. Through an examination of student texts, Young promotes a “poetic basis of mind” in which students and teachers can foster an awareness of their own soul work.

The necessity of engagement is further underscored by Dale Jacobs in “Being There: Revising the Discourse of Emotion and Teaching,” who argues that a teacher must be fully engaged in the classroom to create an atmosphere that fosters a student’s intellectual, emotional, and physical growth. Inviting us into his experience of learning to listen deeply to his students, Jacobs teaches us how to enact that same deep listening in our own literacy classrooms.

Central to engagement is the quality of unity, a dissolution of a dualistic mind set. Marilyn Middendorf tackles the issues of dualism directly in “Discredited Metaphors of Mind Limit Our Vision.” Middendorf claims that metaphors of mind steeped in dualistic, hierarchical imagery undermine our effectiveness in the classroom. She offers us a different vision of mind based on the materialism of current neurological theories of the mind, a version that explodes the mechanic sender-receiver, information transfer model of communication for one that fosters the engagement of dialogic communication.

The cognitive and somatic learning involved in dressage serves as the start for effective teaching for Lorie Heggie in “Flow, Centering, and the Classroom: Wisdom from an Ancient Friend.” Drawing on her experience in learning how to center while engaged in classical riding, Heggie explores how such experience enables her to center in her writing classroom and how such experience enables her to help her students center as well. This physical-intellectual process, Heggie argues, requires our immersion in the task at hand so that we are one with the task, drawn into the marvelous current of flow.

We are symbol-using animals who find in language the means of identification, of consubstantiality, and the need for it. Can we do less in our classrooms that teach sense-ably for engagement? In the spirit of sense-able teaching and the importance of the myriad faces of engagement, we introduce a new section: Connecting. Consisting of teacher narratives and edited by Helen Walker, each contribution serves to connect us more fully to our students’ growth and to our own. ☺

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- . *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1950.

# Imperfection: The Will-to-Control and the Struggle of Letting Go

W. Keith Duffy

I've got a confession to make: I want my students' writing to be *perfect*. I want them to always create spellbinding introductions and use knockout examples. I want them to consistently avoid confusing pronoun shifts and comma splices. I want them to always write with style, grace, and fairness about opposing viewpoints, while developing stunning refutations and humbling accommodations. I want them to always use proper transitional phrases and avoid clichés all the time. I want their writing to be *perfect, perfect, perfect*.

At one point in my life, I thought this was a sensible and even admirable objective. After all, the foundation of my training as a high school and college writing instructor rested upon the notion that the truly great teachers—the ones Hollywood made movies about—were the ones who never stopped pushing their students toward perfection. This notion was further reinforced by professors, career advisors, and cooperating teachers throughout my education: clearly, if I was serious about teaching, I should never accept anything less than perfection from my students, for, if I did, chaos would ensue. I learned this lesson so thoroughly that it became my mantra, my religion. And, as a professional, I was rewarded for it.

After about ten years of teaching and a great deal of self-confrontation, I have finally recognized this training as some of the most damaging I have ever received in my life. By sheer grace, I've finally come to acknowledge that my desire for unrealistic, unobtainable perfection from student writers has actually stunted me as a teacher rather than helped; it represents the biggest professional—and personal—obstacle I've ever faced. Indeed, it has been responsible for some of my lowest, most manipulative moments as a teacher of writing. In my crusade for perfection, I have become the king of appropriation. Over the years, I have consciously taken control of my students' writing for what I considered to be their own good, wrenching their unsteady words from the page and replacing them with my own. I have rewritten their paragraphs and, in some instances, entire essays, and I have obliterated their voices in doing so. In one instance when I was brave enough to actually scrutinize what I was doing, I found that after commenting on a paragraph in a student's rough draft—and doing a bit of ghost-

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writing—I had added 128 words to the student’s original 59 words, and, of those 59, about half of them had been significantly revised by me somehow. Clearly this was an act of wholesale appropriation, and I committed this act to avoid the chaos of undeveloped arguments, the chaos of unclear pronoun references, the chaos of disorganization—in other words, the chaos of imperfection.

I resist making claims of having vanquished this shortcoming. I know my desire for perfection from student writers persists, and I confront it often. I am, of course, aware of the expert advice of teachers and scholars in rhetoric and composition challenging me to relinquish tight control in the classroom (Moxley; Probst; Rule). I’ve read the horror stories of student writers who have become the victims of appropriation (Brannon and Knoblauch; Connors and Lunsford). I have considered the respected opinions of those who suggest that all teachers should examine and challenge the imbalanced and often harmful power relationships inherent in any classroom (Freire; Murray; Shor). While these viewpoints have helped me to mediate my controlling behavior somewhat, I’ve never had too much success comprehensively changing my classroom approach. Each year, when confronted by the imperfections in student writing, I would return faithfully to my tireless search for perfection, and the cycle of appropriation would begin again—crossing out paragraphs and rewriting them wholesale in my own style, redrafting almost entire essays for students, correcting every error I could find. Semester after semester, it became clear that approaching the problem of my perfectionism from pedagogical, political, or psychological angles wasn’t working. I needed an alternative.

Ultimately, that alternative came in the form of the *spiritual*. Through a great deal of self-examination—and with the help of spiritually aware writers like Parker Palmer and Mary Rose O’Reilly—I’ve come to understand that my will-to-control is evidence of a spiritual imbalance. In this essay, I would like to share several key realizations that have helped me to begin articulating an alternative to my controlling behaviors. This discussion begins with an examination of spiritual notions of *imperfection* and ends by acknowledging the *essential role of imperfection* in the writing classroom—not as a brokenness to be fixed or a problem to be solved, but as the source of all humanity and community, indeed as something to be honored. Because of these realizations, I am becoming more able every day to “let go” of my unrelenting demand for perfection and, in so doing, “let go” of my students as well.

## The Reality of Imperfection

Whether an imperfection appears in the form of a comma splice, a logical fallacy, or a stubborn refusal to participate in peer review, my impulse as a teacher is often to solve the problem, to do whatever is needed, to go to any length, so that the error is fixed. Often, the colleagues who most impress us are efficient and creative problem solvers; I myself like to be identified this way. In fact, our need to fix problems is so ingrained in our way of thinking that it is mirrored in some of the most basic theories of rhetoric. For example, according to Lloyd Bitzer, a rhetorical situation first requires an exigency, the realization that something remains unfinished, an urgent need to correct a wrong (5). In my role as

teacher, this same impulse to identify and fix flaws in my students often defined my relationship with them. It was this ingrained way of thinking about imperfections as “problems to be solved” that kept me from having real relationships with most of my students. Instead of being a mentor, a facilitator, a fellow writer, or even a friend to students, I always cast myself in the role of “the one who is charged with identifying and fixing imperfections in students’ writing.”

There is, though, a completely different way of approaching imperfection—a spiritually-sensitive approach best suggested by the umbrella term *spirituality of imperfection*. True to its name, a spirituality of imperfection posits that, at our very cores, we are flawed. Indeed, being imperfect is a natural condition of being human, and by acknowledging our imperfection as commonplace, we can more fully participate with each other *because* this establishes a shared ground. Although acknowledging ourselves as essentially imperfect is certainly challenging, spiritual writers have long insisted on the importance of accepting our dual, paradoxical, mixed-up natures as human beings if we are to unite in meaningful ways. For instance, as Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham point out, the most ancient wisdom of the human race is the “vision of *the human* as essentially mixed, somehow in the middle. To-be-human is to be fundamentally finite, essentially limited, *not-God*” (56). Kurtz and Ketcham offer the ancient Greek image of Dionysus, the god of wine, who, although overweight and often drunkenly stumbling about with a lewd and foolish look on his face, was considered the “promoter of civilization and a lover of peace.” Because of his imperfections, Dionysus could be called a joyful god who also suffered. This notion of human beings as both godly and paradoxically imperfect sprawls across the centuries and has been echoed by many writers. In 1654, French mathematician and mystic Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées* wrote that humans are “a Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything” (72). Similarly, William Barrett suggests that “man occupies a middle position in the universe, between the infinitesimal and the infinite” (117). H. Sheldon Smith quotes Reinhold Niebuhr, who characterizes humans as standing

at the juncture of nature and spirit. On the one hand, he [sic] is involved in the order of nature and is therefore bound. On the other hand, as spirit he transcends nature and himself and is therefore free. Being both bound and free, both limited and unlimited, he invariably experiences anxiety. (210)

It is precisely this anxiety, this tension between paradoxical states, that a spirituality of imperfection says is the cornerstone of a spiritual life.

In more classical religious terms, our mixed-up-ness, our essential imperfection, is illustrated as the confused condition of being both “saint and sinner,” both “beast and angel,” paradoxes that reside in everyone. In his writings, Saint Augustine promotes wholeness by teaching that within each person and within the community as a whole, both good and evil, strength and weakness, coexist, while simultaneously detailing how in this life everyone is to some extent defective and, hence, no one is exempt from the need to seek forgiveness (Miles 1). The apostolic desert father Hermas explores in his writings the conflict between the good and bad angels within each of us (Glimm). Likewise, an even more

ancient story illustrates the very mixed nature of the human condition. One Greek myth claims that the human race evolved from

the remains of the Titans who, because they had eaten an infant god, contained a tiny portion of divine soul-stuff, which was passed on to humans. This Titan myth neatly explained to the ancient Greek why he felt himself to be at once a god and a criminal, why he experienced both the “Appoline” awareness of remoteness from the divine, but also the inkling of identity with it. (Kurtz and Ketcham 57)

To these and many other spiritual teachers and writers, our mixed-up-ness, our limitations, our imperfections, our confused states as both saint-and-sinner and beast-and-angel and human-and-god is the essential paradox that undergirds a spirituality of imperfection. As humans we yearn for a sense of unity in the midst of our “both-and” nature, a need for wholeness amidst our imperfections, a desire to make commensurate the many paradoxes within us.

Understanding the pervasive nature of this confusion, of this imperfection, was my first step in reevaluating my response to the imperfections in students’ writing. From this spiritual perspective, our imperfections are precisely what make us human; they are what give us common ground. In fact, it seems spiritual writers went much further than that. They seem to say that the instability commonly experienced by all humans is to be *honored* because it is precisely our imperfection that unites us in need; it is why students and teachers fundamentally need each other. From this perspective, I began to see a glimmer of how I might retool my relationship to imperfect student writing. Rather than using controlling behaviors to mediate flawedness and, in effect, distance myself from my students by playing the role of “problem solver,” I could instead allow imperfection to deliver me to them by acknowledging the fact that imperfection—including my own—is the very foundation upon which we build our lives. Rather than perceiving imperfection in student writing solely as “error-to-be-fixed,” I began to wonder how imperfection might act as a nexus, a point of contact among essentially imperfect human beings to explore and discuss themselves and their writing. But in order to make this change of heart, I first had to make explicit the relationship between my own sense of imperfection and my tendency to control my students as writers.

### If We Are Imperfect, We Don’t Have Control

For a spirituality of imperfection, there is no give and take on the matter of our incompleteness. The human condition is a condition of limitation and flawedness. And the very realness of our limitation brings us back around to a discussion of control: because of our paradoxical, mixed, and incomplete conditions, we can also not be in absolute control of anything, at least this is what a spirituality of imperfection professes. To have absolute control would mean that we are not imperfect. Personally, I’ve become quite adept at resisting the reality of my essentially limited self by further seeking to control reality in order to deny or diminish my limitations. Striving for control, I imagine, is the most com-

mon reaction when we come face to face with our own limited natures and the limited natures of others. It was precisely this—my will-to-control—that was at the root of my interactions with my students; I was unwilling to accept the reality that my students' writing was imperfect, and I would do whatever was needed to deny that reality—even to the point of appropriation. In a spirituality that honors imperfection, the discussion of control centers around *willfulness*. In the case of my dysfunctional relationship with beginning writers and the way I appropriated their writing, it was my willfulness that made meaningful relationships impossible. As Kurtz and Ketcham argue:

The problem with “willing what cannot be willed” is that we step into a territory that is not ours. Our attempts to wrest control from the uncontrollable has [sic] become the keynote characteristic of our “Age of Addiction.” We try to command those aspects of our lives that cannot be commanded, we try to coerce what cannot be coerced, and in doing so, we ironically destroy the very thing we crave. (126)

I sought help with this problem, and, as I mentioned, I eventually turned to books like Mary Rose O'Reilley's *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*, Parker Palmer's *To Know as We Are Known*, and Wendy Bishop's *Teaching Lives*. In the pages of these books, however, I initially bristled at what I read because, as my controlling self complained, the advice being offered felt too uncritical, too impractical, and too vague. For example, Parker Palmer's now almost-famous catch-phrase “To teach is to create a space” seemed to reposition the teacher as an influential but ultimately shadowy figure working diligently behind the scenes. And, further exploring the territory mapped out by Palmer, Mary Rose O'Reilly states that any sense of control a teacher might have is truly a mirage: “Most of us believe, at some level, that what happens in the classroom is caused by the teacher. In reality, we cause or control very little. To ‘create a space’ acknowledges both our sphere of responsibility and our lack of control” (2). In response, I thought bitterly, “How is advice like that supposed to help me?” Likewise, Bishop suggests that it took her quite a long time to admit that she could not control students but could only determine her own “inner weather” (314). I didn't like what I heard from these authors because, in essence, they were all asking me to face the reality of my powerlessness. But without control, I snarled, what was I to do?

I knew these writers were borrowing and synthesizing ideas from a variety of theological and philosophical traditions. I knew, too, that in many spiritual and religious traditions, issues of control and the need for perfection are considered obstacles to openness and freeness. By controlling others—and oneself—in the never-ending search for perfection, individuals prevent themselves from interacting meaningfully with others. In turn, they deny themselves access to their own spirituality, a spirituality that requires an essential willingness to be with others *as they are* and *as we are*—limited and in need (Downey 1-8). Sensibly, many traditions suggest that the only way to begin the journey toward living fully in the imperfect reality of the ordinary world is to relinquish the need for control and to “let go” of notions of perfection. According to the ideas distilled

from many religious traditions, wholeness, or what we can ever know of it, involves the

letting go of three needs: the need to be in control, the need to be effective, and the need to be right, for detachment from control and the surrender of *the demand to have the last word* seems a prerequisite to the kind of listening that allows for participation. We need to become detached [. . .] from self-importance and the urge to dominate others. (Rohr 3)

Although presented here as three distinct elements, “letting go” of the need for control, the need to be effective, and the need to be right essentially point to the same problem: the destructive nature of controlling others in a search for unobtainable perfection, as well as the difficulty of relinquishing such a desire. “Letting go,” as expressed here, is a tall order and one that, when I first glanced at it, seemed ridiculous. I argued that “letting go” was a ludicrous and even dangerous notion that was incommensurate with my role as a teacher of writing. As I mentioned earlier, in my training as a high school and college writing instructor, I was repeatedly exhorted to do just the opposite: to watch out for students and save them from failing, to keep a close eye on their progress and catch them when they stumbled, to set them aright when they wandered. The concept of “letting go” simply did not seem to apply to the writing classroom at all. After all, I asked myself, how can I continue to be a teacher if I relinquish the need for effectiveness? How on earth can I succeed in an academy that rewards those who desire to have the last word? Likewise, how could I possibly relinquish control and continue to teach a skill that, for centuries, has been characterized as the art of “observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” on a given topic (Aristotle 153)?

In the long run, of course, I discovered that these writers knew something I didn’t. With my willfulness in full swing, I was unable to see “letting go” as a viable alternative to controlling my students. But that was because I was focusing on the wrong thing. In my first encounter with “letting go,” I focused on—and became anxious about—the loss of control, the loss of effectiveness, and the loss of being right. Suddenly it felt as though “letting go” required me to have no ground to stand on. Although I desperately wanted to curb my controlling behaviors, this alternative felt too risky. “Letting go” seemed to be stated in such absolute terms, without degrees of any kind. “Letting go” meant just that—a complete relinquishing. Facing this dilemma, I returned again and again to these three basic needs—the need to be in control, the need to be effective, and the need to be right—examining them closely and searching for some way to make sense of them. Eventually, as I did this, the word *need* surfaced and started to have a significance that I hadn’t considered before. And then it clicked: a spirituality that honored imperfection was not telling me that I couldn’t be in control, be effective, or even be right, at times. These things in and of themselves are not bad. However, what is a major hindrance to living and interacting fully with others is our *willful need* for such things. It is, in fact, our desire, our drive, our *need* to be in control, our *need* to be right, and our *need* to be effective that keep us from being right and being effective and feeling in control. More importantly, it was

my *willful need* for my students to be perfect writers and thinkers that kept me from having real relationships with them. The thing I always assumed was laudable—having high expectations for students and being willing to do whatever was needed to perfect their writing—was precisely the *need* that isolated me from them, and from myself. I was not being asked to relinquish my effectiveness or my sense of rightness, but I was being asked to let go of my desire to have these things with any degree of certainty:

[S]pirituality begins in the acceptance that one is not “in control,” and this necessarily involves a flexible attitude, which requires a mistrust of the rigidities of certainty. In recognizing spirituality’s—life’s—open-endedness, we learn to be flexible and adaptable, thus protecting ourselves from the tendency to want to fix things “once and for all.” (Kurtz and Ketcham 135)

Although it is an uncomfortable undertaking, I eventually discovered, with the help of these and other writers, that a spiritual approach to imperfection challenges us to swim about in the soup of our own uncertainties and limitations. This is precisely the difficult—indeed, daunting—task that a spirituality of imperfection asks of us. In the language of twelve-step spirituality, it is in the lived acceptance and admission of our own powerlessness, in the acknowledgment that we are not in control, that our capacity for being with others is born. A spirituality that honors imperfection begins with the recognition that our controlling attempts to be perfect and our controlling attempts to make others perfect by manipulating them are the most selfish and the most tragic human mistakes. It is by realizing that our imperfections—our essentially limited natures as human beings—are the basis for our humanity that we can begin to realize our own capacity to be with others as learners in the writing classroom.

However, my tendency to want absolute control over my own imperfections—and the imperfections in my students’ writing—is precisely what alienated me from them. Responding to imperfection by attempting to control it—very understandable though it may be—was a willful act of denial on my part. And when we deny our own and our students’ imperfections, we deny everyone’s humanity. For a writing teacher like me who had a penchant for control and a desire for everyone to write and think as perfectly as possible, this was a difficult lesson to learn. In my rational mind, my control was disguised as assistance being offered to help students improve their writing. This, of course, points to the insidious nature of control. Fortunately, I found spiritual writers and teachers reminding me again and again that I simply was not in absolute control of anything—and this is a function of my limited nature as a human being. Simon Tugwell says that “the first work of grace is simply to enable us to begin to understand what is wrong. And one of the first things that is wrong is that we are not in control; we do not have all the answers” (50).

### The Essential Role of Imperfection

In the simplest terms, a spirituality that honors imperfection asks us to accept the reality that we are, at a very basic level, paradoxical beings. Following



this, the reality of that paradox necessarily means that we are not in absolute control of anything—ultimately including our students and their writing, as O'Reilly and Palmer, among others, suggest. This type of spirituality asks us to examine our willingness to relinquish that need for control, for it is only in doing so that we can begin to converse with our own spirits and, hence, our students.

Of course, these realizations have prompted me to pose a litany of questions to myself. How does my will-to-control exert itself in other areas of my teaching—in my writing assignments, student/teacher conferences, and my approach to writing groups in the classroom? Furthermore, is “letting go” of control really a viable pedagogical approach? Exactly how universal is this suggestion? Could this approach be harmful or dangerous in some situations? How does a teacher know when to “let go”? Indeed, might it sometimes be helpful for teachers to take control of students’ texts to show them a better way? And anyway, how does one define control?

In response to these slippery questions, perhaps a caveat is in order: I want to stress that any spiritual response or approach that I am discovering is right only for me—it is a proper one for my practice. While I feel confident that it has helped me become a better teacher, I can make no absolute claim here of its usefulness. Clearly, “letting go” will not work in everyone’s practice, and in some instances it might even be counterproductive. Instead, it has been important for me to understand that my reasons for wanting to explore control—and the spiritual response of “letting go”—stem from my own experience of teacher training as I mentioned, where no one dared to speak of such matters. In grade school, my experienced teachers sometimes restricted my freedom or creativity in repressive ways, especially in the writing classroom, but they told me their actions were “for my own good.” In her autobiographical *A Life in School*, Jane Tompkins recalls similar tactics used by teachers to keep potentially disruptive students on task:

When Mrs. Seebach, of the enormous bosom and the enormous behind, bellowed at us in gym class, seized by demonic rage over a student’s failure properly to execute grand right and left, I trembled. I could have made the same mistake. Once Mrs. Seebach did ridicule me in front of the class because I didn’t know how to tie a knot at the end of a piece of thread; there was no knowing when it would happen again. (5)

I suspect that there might be a little of Mrs. Seebach in many of us, and perhaps the only way for a teacher to know when and how to let go is by paying attention. Ultimately, I do not know if it is possible for teachers of writing—or any teacher, for that matter—to relinquish the need to be right, the need to be effective, and the need to be in control and still teach what they have been hired to teach. One thing is certain for me, however: paying attention to my own penchant for controlling student texts, acknowledging my own and my students’ imperfections as the building blocks of our humanity, has delivered me to my students in ways that I never before thought possible. ☺

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# Felt Sensing of Speech Acts in Written Genre Acquisition

Randall Popken

*There are [. . .] various classes of speech, to one of which every speech belongs [. . .]. The student of rhetoric must [. . .] acquire a proper knowledge of these classes and then be able to follow them accordingly with his senses when he sees them in the practical affairs of life.*

—Plato's *Phaedrus*

As it has developed over the last two decades, genre theory—drawing from anthropology, classical rhetoric, educational theory, discourse analysis, English as a Second Language, linguistics, and literary theory—has provided theorists and teachers with a way to understand written discourse (e.g., Berkenkotter and Huckin; Swales). Moreover, as is shown by its use in new textbooks such as John Trimbur's *The Call to Write*, genre theory also has applications to the teaching of writing in college. A particularly applicable sub-discipline within genre scholarship has been work in an area known as “genre acquisition” (Freedman, “Show” 248). Essentially, this scholarship sets out to identify principles governing the behavior of developing writers when they produce genres with which they have had little or no familiarity. The potential pedagogical importance of work in genre acquisition is clear: consistent theories about how humans acquire genres should help composition teachers develop a paradigm for genre instruction, including more effective courses and writing tasks.

Much of the scholarship<sup>1</sup> in genre acquisition centers on the role played by social contexts: local rhetorical situations, contexts within discourse communities, and cultural contexts. Borrowing from situated learning theory, Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin analyze ways that developing writers get genre knowledge by being immersed in contexts of a genre's typical use—for example, through “participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life” (482). Other similar scholarship investigates what genre knowledge con-

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<sup>1</sup> I limit my scope in this paper to genre acquisition in adult (college level and beyond) writers. However, there is also a growing body of scholarship involving written genre acquisition by children.

sists of and how rhetorical contexts affect the process of acquiring a genre's features (e.g., Freedman and Adam).

Although this socially-oriented scholarship tells us much about what features writers acquire and how their acquisition is related to situationality, its shortcoming is that it only looks at developing writers from the "outside" rather than telling us about the role played *by the writers themselves* in the acquisition process. This is precisely the point made by John Ackerman in his comment that social interpretations of the acquisition process can "obscure other kinds of genre activity that may not be so easily found either in formal, public texts or in ongoing critical debate" (147).

In this paper the "other kind of genre activity" that I center on is the felt sensing that developing writers rely on when they acquire new genres. In one of her early papers on genre acquisition, Aviva Freedman had already taken a step toward investigating this phenomenon. Freedman reports on a study she did of the acquisition of an unfamiliar genre by a group of Canadian undergraduate students taking an introductory law course. These students had no prior law courses, had never written the genre they were being asked to write, nor had they model texts to imitate. Nonetheless, they were able to produce the genre successfully, an accomplishment that amazed Freedman and her research team ("Learning" 112). In explaining how these students' genre knowledge "is derived, [and] on what it is based" (103), Freedman argues that the students came to the course already having written a number of academic genres from which they had inferred a "broad schema for academic discourse" (103). Thus, when they first entered the unfamiliar law genre, the students brought with them a "dimly felt sense" of it (104). Then, this felt sense was "modified" through various aspects of the class, including "lectures, seminars, readings, and class experiences as constrained by the questions posed in the assignments themselves" (106). Moreover, the felt sense was "both given form and reshaped" (100) as it interacted with the students' act of doing the discourse—their composing processes: "there is a shuttling back and forth between this felt sense and the unfolding text, each modifying the other as the text unfolds" (102). In short, although these writers started only with a generalized sense of academic discourse, "some features of the genre are created in the actual process of composing" (106).

By proposing a phenomenological model, Freedman takes a bold and important step toward broadening the theoretical framework for talking about written genre acquisition. Still, as Freedman herself admits, there is much more to be explored regarding the potential role of felt sensing in genre acquisition. Furthermore, as a college writing teacher, I am uncomfortable with the way that Freedman sees felt sensing as the be-all-and-end-all for the acquisition of *every* genre property area, including its "shape, structure, rhetorical stance, [and] thinking strategies" ("Learning" 102). In other words, it seems premature to close off discussions about the ways of knowing that are at work in genre acquisition simply by chalking *everything* up to felt sensing. Instead, we need more extensive theorizing and investigation, which, on the one hand, might lend credibility to Freedman's critics, who argue for conscious processes in genre acquisition (Williams and Columb); on the other hand, it might ultimately support Freedman's claims. Either way, more work on felt sensing in genre acquisition could also

contribute to current conversations about language acquisition in general by ESL scholars and linguists and to the growth of a paradigm for teaching genre.

But, in order to be on solid ground, the conversation about felt sensing and genre acquisition has to be more specific than it has been in Freedman's scholarship. After all, genres consist of a wide variety of "property" areas, ranging from formal (e.g., syntax, cohesion, superstructures) to non-formal (e.g., epistemological assumptions, kinds of specificity) properties. Thus, in order to make any claims at all about the role of felt sensing in genre acquisition, we need to focus on how it might work in some of these property areas. In this paper, I want to open such an exploration by looking at illocutionary speech acts, which are the very essence of genre. In the following pages, I begin by discussing the role played by illocutionary speech acts in genres, then I offer a theory for how felt sensing functions in acquiring this aspect of genre, and finally I discuss the issue of felt sensing and attempts to teach illocutionary speech acts to developing writers.

### The Role of Speech Acts in Genres

Many contemporary theorists agree that rhetorical action is the essence of genre; in fact, genres are most frequently defined as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller 159). But rhetorical actions are also the abstract phenomena that speech act theorists following Austin and Searle call "illocutionary speech acts," or simply "speech acts" (Bazerman 88).<sup>2</sup> The connection between genre and speech act, then, is that they both do the same thing. Each genre performs at least one (and usually more than one) primary speech act—it might *state, describe, assert, warn, remark, comment, order, apologize, criticize, request, demand, welcome, promise, object, censure, illustrate, rhapsodize, predict, clarify*, and so on. This primary speech act is the "large-scale typification of rhetorical action" that Carolyn Miller speaks of (163) and that Charles Bazerman calls a "macro-act." As an example of a primary speech act, Larry Selinker, Mary Todd-Trimble, and Louis Trimble show how *detailing an experiment* is central to the genre of a scientific research article (312).

However, speech acts exist at more than just this primary level in genres. Embedded within primary speech acts are other secondary speech acts; from this perspective, a genre is a speech act with other speech acts embedded in it. Thus, in the scientific research article mentioned above (in which *detailing an experiment* is the global speech act), the following secondary speech acts are likely: *stating purpose; reporting past research; discussing theory; stating the problem, reporting results, reporting conclusions, and justifying experimental procedure* (Selinker, Todd-Trimble, and Trimble 312). Together, these primary and second-

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<sup>2</sup> Refining Austin's work, Searle later posited four categories of this rhetorical action (of speech acts): the *locutionary act* (the action of uttering concrete words, phrases, morphemes, sentences); the *propositional act* (roughly equivalent to the semantic content); the *illocutionary act* (the performance, the actual "doing" of the act); and the *perlocutionary act* (the actual effect being made on the hearers or readers). However, when theorists refer to "speech acts" today, they most commonly are talking about illocutionary acts (Campbell).

ary speech acts make up the elemental rhetorical action in a genre—something I will refer to as the genre’s “speech act core.” The actual surface level coding of the speech act core may have hundreds of varieties; however, there tend to be similar ways of coding speech acts within genres, though the range of options depends entirely on how flexible the genre is.

Even though it is abstract, the speech act core is one of a genre’s primary identifying features, and it is a critical feature of a genre for the developing writer. Because each genre has a unique relationship to its situation, each genre also has a unique speech act core. It follows that, when developing writers acquire a new genre, they have to know the genre’s speech act core. In fact, if a developing writer who is attempting to learn a new genre produces a text without the genre’s speech act core, the result will be something else, not at all the original genre.

### Acquiring the Speech Act Core through Experiencing and Felt Sensing

Because a genre’s speech act core is so abstract, acquiring it depends heavily on felt sensing. Of course, developing writers may memorize superstructures, scripts, style features, or cohesive devices that often accompany certain speech acts; in a textbook, they might even read about *topoi* for inventing the contents that carry out speech acts. But the speech act itself isn’t something people can memorize or merely read about. As I noted above, it is an abstract action. It is something like the phenomenon of play in a sport; one can learn the many formal characteristics and rules of, say, tennis, but the essence of the sport is the *playing itself* (Freadman). Thus, to know this abstract quality of play in tennis, one has to have done the sport. Similarly, to know a speech act in a genre, one has to *experience* it, usually first as a reader or hearer of the genre. Experiencing, as Eugene Gendlin has theorized, is a dynamic process of being-in-life, the “raw, present, ongoing, functioning (in us)” (*Experiencing* 11). Accompanying experiencing is a “concretely present flow of feeling” (*Experiencing* 11), an “ever present feeling mass” (*Experiencing* 13). Felt sensing, which “functions in every situation, and in a highly orderly way,” is a “body-sense” that humans have about whatever they encounter (Gendlin, “Thinking” 90, 104).

To analyze the felt sensing that writers might utilize when they experience a genre’s speech act core, let me turn to a hypothetical example. Assume, for instance, that a young woman—a recent graduate of a small liberal arts college—receives in the mail from her alma mater a specimen of a genre we might call the “funding solicitation letter.” While this genre may contain several secondary speech acts, without a doubt one of its primary speech acts is *persuading a reader to make a contribution to an academic institution*. If she takes the letter seriously enough to read it carefully, at once the young woman may feel the force of the letter’s particular brand of persuasion. This rhetorical action, whether she accepts the persuasion or not, presses on her, bombarding her emotions with appeals such as these: “Your contributions will benefit the students of the future,” “The gift you give will help us continue to operate into the next decade,” “Your children and your children’s children will benefit from the college’s long term stability,” and “We will be able to add computer terminals for all library patrons.”

The young woman's experiencing of persuasion in this genre may result in some complex, perhaps even at times contradictory, felt sensing. For instance, she may wince, sneer, or even giggle at the persuasion. At the same time, experiencing the speech act may create a Burkean identification with the institution. That is, her experiencing might trigger visions (perhaps even dreamy images) of a peaceful campus, brilliant faculty, and interesting students; through reading the letter (and, through the years, reading others like it), she may thus become "substantially one" (Burke 20) with the letter's rhetorical action and its source. As the young woman internalizes this genre's special kind of persuasion, her felt sensing ultimately becomes "felt meaning," "the meaning-to-us of the concepts" (Gendlin, *Experiencing* 230). When this happens, she has begun to acquire the primary speech act of the genre.

Let me now change the scene and show the same young woman five years later after taking a position as a fund-raiser in the development office at her alma mater, a job that calls upon her to write this solicitation letter genre herself. Now she has to acquire the genre as a *producer* rather than just as a reader of it; thus, at this point she has to re-experience the speech act core as a writer, which is probably more demanding than experiencing it as a reader. As she experiences the solicitation letter as a writer, the young woman has an increased overlapping of many other, adjacent felt sensings, e. g., about the profession, about the specific institution where she is working, about the goals of her work, about the policies and strategies of her direct supervisor. In short, social and cultural considerations now bear especially heavily upon the genre learner's experiencing. Furthermore, this experiencing as a writer might even lead the young woman to an anxious felt sensing about having to perform the primary speech act, of trying to convince someone to give money to the college.

Of course, the young woman's felt sensing as a writer may also overlap with those she formed earlier as a reader of the genre. Gendlin notes that in the process of the intermingling of felt senses "[a]ny experiential meaning can schematicize another experiential meaning, or be schematicized by any other experiential meaning" (*Experiencing* 167). Thus, the identification that the woman experienced as a reader may loom so large that it also provides a framework for her new experiences as a writer. In short, all subsequent experiences she has with this speech act core may be driven by her dreamy images of the campus, faculty, and students.

Furthermore, an all-important dimension of the young woman's genre acquisition both as a reader and a writer is that her felt sensing helps her perceive the relationship between the genre's speech act core and the rhetorical situation in which the genre is used. This relationship, like the speech act core itself, is highly abstract. In fact, Amy Devitt proposes that genre (and, thus, its speech act core) and situation aren't really separate entities at all. Because felt sensing is "supralogical" and can hold "more than a given logic can represent" (Gendlin, *Experiencing* 26), the developing writer can perceive simultaneously "the language and the situation" (Gendlin, "Thinking" 104). In short, the writer knows that situation is the speech act and that speech act *is* the situation.

Felt sensing may also provide this young woman with the ability to utilize speech acts from genres she has written or read in the past. After all, it is well

established that past genres can provide a powerful backdrop for the acquisition of new genres (Lucas; Popken, "Genre Transfer"). But the role of these past genres in the acquisition and production of new ones is two-dimensional—and, thus, potentially contradictory. For instance, on the one hand, the young woman has to be able to distinguish the persuading in the funding solicitation letter from the persuading in other genres she may have written or read: newspaper editorials, scientific papers, automobile advertisements, love letters. While the term "persuasion" describes the primary speech act in all four of these genres, the nuances among different varieties of persuasion are critical. She couldn't, after all, simply take the variety of persuasion used in a scientific paper and use it whole cloth in a solicitation letter.

On the other hand, the young woman can't divorce herself entirely from the persuading in other genres; in fact, there is the possibility that lurking in those prior genres are speech act experiences that could reify, solidify, and reinforce what she is trying to do in the solicitation letters. For example, she may once have read an editorial whose persuasive appeal is soft enough but clear enough to coincide with what she needs to use for the letter of sales appeal. This phenomenon is "transliteration"—when a developing writer acquires a new genre by borrowing, bending, and re-shaping aspects of a previous genre, fitting them into the new genre (Popken, "Uncertainty").

However, it seems likely that the conscious mind can't separate speech acts and, at the same time, transliterate them. But felt sensing probably can. According to Gendlin, through felt sensing humans can perceive contradictory dimensions of their experiences. For instance, felt sensing permits us to perceive both a whole and its parts simultaneously: "when we think a situation, its whole past history functions in how we think it" ("Thinking" 82), but we "need not think the past details each separately. They function implicitly in how we think the situation" ("Thinking" 88). Thus, it also seems feasible that through felt sensing we can sort out the differences between the abstract persuasion and the specific versions of that speech act in different genres. Gendlin's notions about felt sensing also help explain transliteration. That is, as I noted earlier, by their very nature various felt sensings overlap and intertwine; a felt sense can be "applicable to two, otherwise diverse things. Therefore, it can be a relation of likeness between them" (Gendlin, *Experiencing* 159). Felt sensing gives humans the ability to mix and match, taking speech acts from one genre and reshaping them for another, very different genre.

Let me now return briefly to offer an alternative interpretation of the case of the remarkable genre acquisition reported by Freedman in her study of students in a law course. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Freedman theorizes that these students came to the class with a felt sense about academic discourse in general and that this felt sense, modified in a number of ways, then carried them through to acquiring all the necessary properties of the genre used in the class. However, if we consider the role of speech acts in genre acquisition, Freedman's sweeping generalization about felt sensing being responsible for the *entire* acquisition process may not be true. Instead, what I believe occurred was that, over the entire year in which the course was given, the students in Freedman's study developed a felt sense of the speech act core of the genre they were called upon



to write.<sup>3</sup> This felt sense may have developed from what the students experienced in the class through the professor's lectures and class discussions; it also may have come as a result of the students' experiences writing, listening to, or reading hundreds (perhaps thousands) of other genres through the years, genres with adjacent—if not identical—speech acts. Furthermore, although Freedman indicates that all the students weren't necessarily of high ability ("Learning" 97), it seems likely that, taking such a specialized elective course, they were motivated enough to identify with the speech acts involved in the genre they acquired.

Then, guided by a felt sense of—and an identification with—the speech act core, the students might have used more conscious ways of thinking in order to invent some of the formal and informal properties needed to code those speech acts. For instance, they may have called on their memory of previously read texts for phrasing, superstructures, or personae; they may have called upon principles they learned from rhetoric textbooks or handbooks for options to create cohesion; and they may even have consciously applied heuristic devices to invent content. In short, these students' acquisition of the law genre probably combined a conscious knowledge of properties used to code the core speech acts with a felt sense of how to use them in the context of this new genre. After all, felt sensing functions as a kairotic barometer, helping humans to "orient [them]selves in situations and make appropriate responses, all on the basis of the felt meanings of observation" (Gendlin, *Experiencing* 68). Using felt sensing both to know the core speech acts and to know how to situate those speech acts, the students in Freedman's study were well on their way to acquiring the genre.

### Pedagogical Considerations

I have argued in this paper, first, that acquiring speech acts is central to being able to "know" a genre and, second, that felt experiencing is the way developing writers acquire that genre's speech acts. If these contentions are true, they carry with them some important considerations for teaching writing, especially for developing a paradigm for teaching genres.

First, it should be obvious that—in spite of their importance in the process of genre acquisition—speech acts can't simply be "taught" in the direct, isolated way they have been for over one hundred years. Nineteenth and early twentieth century American composition teaching often isolated the "modes of discourse" and "patterns of exposition" (the theoretical precursors of speech acts) for teaching. That same approach, in fact, still exists today in college textbooks such as Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper's *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*. In Part One of the latest edition of their book, Axelrod and Cooper isolate the following

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<sup>3</sup> Of note is the fact that the study was based on four writing assignments that the students wrote over a nine-month period, which means that the first one probably wasn't even produced until two months into the term. We also don't know whether Freedman studied the writings from earlier in the year or later; in other words, it isn't clear whether "acquisition" was most apparent immediately or in the later writings. If, in fact, it was the later writings that Freedman examined, then students would have had ample time to identify with and internalize the key speech acts used for the new genre.

primary speech acts: *remembering events, remembering people, explaining a concept, arguing a position, proposing a solution, justifying an evaluation, speculating about causes, and interpreting stories*. Then, in Part Three, Axelrod and Cooper further isolate what amount to secondary speech acts: *narrating, describing, defining, classifying, comparing and contrasting, and arguing*. Overall, Axelrod and Cooper assume that these speech acts exist in many different genres and that if students “master” these speech acts they will become fluent, able to survive in virtually any rhetorical context where they are used. But, as I have already suggested, speech acts take on the colorings of the particular contexts of each genre they inhabit; therefore, this discursive ecology is violated by such a decontextualized pedagogy (Freedman, Adam, and Smart).

Worse yet, a pedagogy that isolates speech acts doesn’t allow developing writers to capitalize on the power of felt experiencing in the acquisition process. If a formal “unit of instruction” centers on the conceptual side of *explaining a concept*, for instance, students won’t necessarily experience the richness of this speech act as rhetorical action. In other words, isolated speech act pedagogies give students a pre-packaged, homogenized, simplified version of a speech act rather than allowing them to participate in—and, ultimately, to identify with—it. Acquisition seems more likely if students feel the speech act by participating in the flow of discursive action through readings, class discussions, lectures, and other student-to-teacher and student-to-student interactions.

Unfortunately, creating an experiential speech act pedagogy is hard to do, especially considering the limitations inherent in writing courses in American higher education. I can attest to how difficult it is to do this through many of my own (often failed) experiments teaching research writing to first-year students. Among several genres I typically assign in such a course is the research prospectus, a genre whose primary speech acts include *informing a research director about plans for a project and persuading that director that one has the competence to carry it out*. Of course, all the students in these classes know something in general about *informing* and *persuading*; all their lives they have been informed and persuaded about problems to avoid, things to buy, and courses of action to take. But, when I refer to the speech acts *informing* and *persuading* as they are used in a research prospectus, many of my students don’t really get what I’m talking about. At best, their first efforts are often just imitations of the forms that accompany the speech acts. But how can I *expect* first-year students to know what I am talking about? After all, the research prospectus is a fairly sophisticated genre, inseparable from communities of scholars and their shared research interests. Many beginning college students have trouble imagining that community, let alone participating in it.

So, in trying to create an experiential pedagogy for speech act acquisition in the research class mentioned above, I have to orchestrate classroom circumstances in which students can (a) experience the academic community so that they can (b) experience the speech act in order to (c) identify with it, (d) develop felt senses about it, and, ultimately, (e) acquire it. This is a tall order, indeed. Through the years, of course, writing teachers have tried to get students to identify with communities (academic and otherwise) through “case” assignments, through assignments asking them to write for “real” contexts (such as newspapers), and,

more recently, through assignments asking them to incorporate community service. While the theories inherent in these pedagogies have some value, there is much more to know about how speech act (and discourse) experiencing and identifying take place. As of yet, though, there is little theory to draw upon for help (e.g., see Ivanic).

Therefore, without much theory on which to build an experiential speech act pedagogy, the best I can do when I teach genres such as the research prospectus is to draw heavily on my own experience and my own felt sensing. For instance, if I have myself experienced and identified intimately with the informing and persuading in the prospectus, I can more easily “explicate” them when I present them to my students (Gendlin, *Experiencing* 112). But even more than that, as a teacher I have try to recreate and extend my own experiencing every time I teach the research prospectus. That is, I have to do the best I can to immerse myself and the class in the genre and its speech act core through stories about prospectuses I have written or read and descriptions about the situational circumstances surrounding them. Perhaps, if I do it this way, there will be something infectious about experiencing. After all, as Gendlin tells us, “If someone tells a story, describes experiences, or continues for any length of time on one discourse, or one context, all his [sic] meanings create in us a felt meaning of relevance” (*Experiencing* 135). ☺

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# Teacher Growing Pains

Carolina Mancuso

*Solution comes only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light. But this reconstruction means travail of thought.*

—John Dewey,  
The Child and the Curriculum and The School and Society

In my family, ailments without a specific diagnosis became classified as “growing pains”: aches in the legs, butterflies in the stomach, mild roving annoyances that provoked complaint but didn’t warrant missing school. I waited impatiently to outgrow them, watched suspiciously as the diagnosis endured in my much older siblings’ adolescence. Still, there was hope. According to the cultural currency of the era, at twenty-one you “arrived,” became a finished product, an adult. Not until my budding adulthood did my parents’ insight seem ahead of its time. For, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when researchers heralded the series of transitions adults encounter, the cultural myth of a finished adulthood was smashed. Or was it?

Recognition of passages beyond the “phases” so touted in childhood lifted a great burden. Proving adulthood seemed a hopeless task, boding repeated failure. There was relief in accepting growing pains as intermittent and inevitable, and exhilaration in freeing the next generation from that heavy load. I delighted, as a single mother, in reassuring my son that he need not bear the old burdens of certain maturity (whatever that might be) at a given age. I delighted also in sharing my own multiple “phases.” Tough as they were, they marked progress along the path of adulthood, each survival signaling hope. However, I still harbored some yearning for completion, as modernist notions persisted, with societal pressure continuing on many fronts for me to “arrive.” Nor was I alone. Others periodically roiled through stormy seas; grew weary of facing the same issues repeatedly; suffered frustration at knowing a transition was appropriate, yet unable to raise much compassion for themselves; and, yes, found such topics taboo in most social circles, especially professional life. This last especially haunted me, merging the myth of adult-as-finished-product with the dis-ease of a rigid border between life and work. Gradually, I came to prefer a concept of adulthood akin to

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Julie Henderson's "current definition": someone for whom the "habituated response" will no longer do, "someone who trusts being able to respond in the moment." In the fields of writing, the theatre arts, and teaching, I had found some areas conducive to acknowledging growing pains as well as the unity of life and work. Yet, even in teaching, with students as relentless reminders of ongoing change, how often do we simply roll our eyes and neatly name their issues "a phase"?

My purpose here is not to synthesize the vast field of adult transitions but to contextualize my own journey through it in a conversation about its impact on education and our ability to grow in wholeness individually and in community. To do so, I will 1) begin with a somewhat homespun discussion of adult passages, grounded in educational theory; 2) continue with a look at the persistent positivist mythology regarding "teacher," which upholds such dichotomies as separation of life and work, even in schooling, a critical and primary contact zone between generations; 3) relate the story of a teacher education course I taught for six years that impelled me to grapple with the interrelationship of student and teacher growing pains in the classroom; and 4) conclude with ways in which that inquiry has shaped my practice and my life.

### Growing Adults/Growing Students

No doubt prepared for this by my parents, I have likened adult growing pains, however manifested, to those of the child who, teetering on adolescence, still clutches a well-worn toy. Though today we are warned of some passages—who could avoid the media hype about mid-life crises?—these stages of transformation often occur unexpectedly, some with drama, some at first barely noticed. These stages of transformation often occur unwillingly. The way things have been is suddenly overshadowed by our sense of how they will be. In these gestations, we try on new selves—physically, intellectually, spiritually—not quite knowing whether to discard the old. Such change resonates to seasonal transitions, where the chill of approaching winter pierces the sunniest of autumn days, where spring overlaps winter, warring in our bodies and minds as well as the environment. Growing pains can be age- or circumstance-appropriate: marriage, divorce, child-bearing/rearing, illness, aging (our parents and ourselves), grieving, the tribulations of daily living. Some occur in every life; others, more selective. But no one completely escapes.

Pondering growing pains, I am drawn to Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" as an umbrella for our sojourns in various passages. As the distance between actual (independently demonstrable) development and potential development (guided or in collaboration), the zone references "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state" (86). I take inspiration also from a theme weaving through Maxine Greene's work: her vision of "incompleteness" as a project to be valued, cultivated, rooted in humanness itself, and capable of reciprocating with the gift of openness to possibilities, even those not yet foreseen (Releasing xi-xii).

In an era rich with scholarship on multiple ways of learning and knowing

and alternative approaches to facilitating students' engagement, many educators writing about the spiritual side of teaching remind us that as teachers we are role models of adulthood, however unwittingly, with attendant responsibility. Mary Rose O'Reilly, for one, frames the task of teaching as assisting students in the quest to find the "inner teacher" so they might place themselves within their own journeys (5). She intends this also for teachers, exhorting us to practice acceptance even when students' inner teachers disagree with our own. Space for reflection in the classroom, she believes, is key to discovering and expressing inner truths, making the atmosphere "a lot more edgy and astonishing" (7). She describes a practice of "deep listening" in which she engages with a friend, each permitted to speak nearly uninterrupted for a length of time, a rare exposure to being truly heard (17). This is listening not to change but to acknowledge the other, a kind of attention critical in education where "[p]eople are dying in spirit for lack of it. In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument.[...] [P]eople often listen with an agenda" (19). Peter Elbow also addresses this phenomenon in his exploration of the "doubting game" and the "believing game," the former in which skepticism supercedes any other reaction and the latter in which one extends openness to another's possibility, even without proof, in the effort to understand (147-49).

In my efforts to bring more awareness into the moment, I have used the term "deep listening," not in a construct of an exclusive time frame for talking and being heard, but to remind myself to listen between the lines; absorb pauses and silences, body language and emotional tenor; extend beyond syntax and choice of words. I see this as linked to good parenting and good counseling, thus to another notion I feel compelled to raise with student teachers: unconditional love or "redemptive love," which bell hooks, using Howard Thurman's definition, describes as an affirming love that aims to touch and release "the core of one's being" (118). I think of "unconditional love," like "deep listening," as based not necessarily on liking but on a compassionate and intentional caring, i.e., valuing and making room for each student to be and to become. It relies on compassion and the desire for growth, for the best of what an individual's life can be.

### A Human Face and the Prevailing Image of Teacher

The fiction of "completed growth" bears heavy responsibility for the separation of being and doing, of life and work that sometimes appears as a hallmark of education. In fact, the unsettling requirement to move between "the analytical and intuitive aspects of life" accompanies us nearly everywhere in our society (O'Reilly 33). I can only describe it as good fortune that my first teaching experiences reinforced holistic values and a theoretical base to support them. In the 1970s, I stumbled upon an alternative school founded upon the principles of Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and the British Infant Schools. Unlike traditional settings of the time, these pre-school to eighth-grade children did not sit in rows facing the front of the room, quietly waiting for teacher to direct the show. They moved around, talked, and worked (even noisily) in small groups across age and ability levels, and sought and pursued their compelling interests, i.e., displayed the

boundless curiosity the young usually do until repressed in the name of “good” behavior or schooling. That was an “edgy and astonishing” milieu, one I wanted for both my son and myself, a place where adults (teachers and parents) and children interacted as people, learning and teaching together, with teamwork the key to an ever-evolving sense of community. The highest value, articulated and manifested, was holistic growth and change, lifelong learning with mind, body, and spirit. It was a work site where my growing pains were as welcome as the children’s. The four years I spent there powerfully shaped all the rest to come.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, I knew that this milieu was a hothouse flower. Traditionally, schools have been places where teacher and students can remain quite separate, in spite of continual contact. A kind of class system exists, not just in terms of expertise and authority, of course, but also in terms of humaneness. Take a look at what was/is in most educational settings. Teachers inherit a legacy of myth and image decrying “person-in-process,” frequently an unexamined legacy they model and pass on. Forget exploding the myth for students, even among colleague. Teacher development and collaboration often remains a low priority, if recognized at all. Among the myth’s demands are acceptance of specialization (despite its limitations), expert knowledge within that area (supposing static boundaries), mastery of students’ multiple learning needs, facility as strict disciplinarians, composure of self at all times, and the ability to do it all singlehandedly in an isolated classroom. Intense days with minimal planning time at school and the long nights and weekends working at home are overlooked in the cultural joke that teachers have summers off and banker’s days. The mere fact of having attended school makes people self-appointed arbiters of teaching quality. Teaching is notoriously low on salary and respectability scales, which surely stalls greater professionalization and no doubt influences students in ways we may not perceive. Yet teachers are the folks who bear a primary responsibility for nurturing society’s greatest resource. What is missing in their preparation that might promote the expression of their humanity rather than the perpetuation of mythology?

In *A Life in School*, Jane Tompkins laments the minimal preparation teachers receive for what they will “encounter in a human sense,” especially the reality of how powerfully students’ everyday lives shape each day in the classroom. She notes: “Teaching, by its very nature, exposes the self to myriad forms of criticism and rejection, as well as to emulation and flattery and love. Day after day, teachers are up there, on display; no matter how good they are, it’s impossible not to get shot down” (90). The relationship between teachers and students is indeed far more intimate than ordinarily acknowledged, with potential for growth on each side closely related to the quality of their interaction. Contact and visibility seem higher than in most other professions, with some teachers in near-daily contact with their “clients” for as much as a year. Teacher “transparency” is inevitable. Students too know how teachers’ lives shape their days. They can detect insincerity or trouble brewing. They may not know it’s due to an age-appropriate “phase,” but the fallout for them is clear.

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<sup>1</sup> The New School of Utica (New York) was founded in 1974 by Anna Roelofs, also founder and co-director of Primary Source, a resource center for humanities teachers in Boston.



As models (however unwilling) of adulthood, why do teachers not admit the reality of continual growth and change, giving students a sense of developing personhood, holding a mirror to their future evolution? Could that admission itself be the core of our attendant responsibility? Why not illuminate the foibles of the unattainable yet also tarnished image of “teacher”? Clinging to pretense only increases division, supports ageism on each side. We rightfully expect students to face the sufferings engendered by meaning making. We worry if they don’t. Yet we withhold our own, missing opportunities, preserving unwarranted power. I’m not suggesting that we confide our deep life transitions to students but that we confirm their existence, especially when they affect the dynamic of a class. Nor am I suggesting that confiding is easy. Institutions, and often colleagues, rarely support such revelations.

Enacting change always requires moving away from what Dewey calls “fixed” meanings and towards a curriculum which brings work and life together and makes the classroom a site for what Kristie Fleckenstein calls “exploratory pedagogy.” When often misfocused emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing supplants opportunities for broadening vistas in the classroom, teachers must support each other in the most rigorous endeavor: the quest for wholeness for our students and ourselves. Wholeness, after all, is not doneness; rather, it accepts, even anticipates, the pains of growing and the transformations they bring. The exploratory pedagogy, as Fleckenstein defines it, allows enactment of such a quest by using nontraditional means as complement to “social, liberatory, and cognitive approaches[. . .]. [Its] potential [. . .] to create a spiritual center lies in its efforts to acknowledge the importance of affect in cognition, affirm the worth of personal experience, transform our concept of the self, and build meaning dialectically” (27).

An admission of human flaws takes courage in teaching as in everything. Yet, at any level, a heartfelt discussion of life’s lessons can have deep ramifications for constructing new knowledge, offering inspiration, clearing the air. Good practice compels us to examine what happens in the classroom. Why not invite students into that practice of reflection as well? Learning, after all, is hard to name, its roots in discomfort often hidden. With reflection a low value in our society, students may not see connections, just as we can miss them in ourselves. Strengthening their metacognitive processes might make their growing pains more bearable, as it does ours.

### An Autobiographical Expedition: Life, Work, and Growing Pains in the Classroom

In the past decade, launching a career in teacher education, I have watched these concerns crystallize in my vision of teaching and learning as communal holistic human growth. The deepening of this vision, which still exists mostly in my “zone of proximal development,” sparked my decision to become a teacher of teachers. In midlife, teaching had become even more, as Wendy Bishop puts it, about both “avocation and vocation” (131). Seeking to unify professional and personal growth, I wanted the chance to help others to find the “human side of teaching” while learning to live it myself. I had begun to know the particular

burdens of later life passages, as mortality looms and meanings and perspectives on the future dramatically shift. Working on the practice of compassion, I reminded myself that in any group of students, many (maybe most) may also be passing through turbulent life stages at any one time, perhaps exacerbated by the injustices within our society. At the very least, they must cope with the transformations demanded by learning. And I had learned by then that, at any age group or level, aside from certain privileges and responsibilities, what I am doing in the classroom as a teacher is at core nearly indistinguishable from what they are doing as students.

Again, good fortune drew me to a program with an atmosphere of collaboration and the commitment to change schools, society, and lives. In this new setting, how would I deal with the passages, personal and professional, still ahead? What would it take to live the complexity my vision described, to trust my response in the moment? What follows is a long-term (thus frustrating) and recent (thus scary) story of learning to see double, to discern when students' and teachers' growing pains coincide (or collide), and to pursue the arduous decisions that recognition requires.

From 1994 to 2000, I had the pleasure and the challenge of teaching a course entitled *Autobiographical Expedition: Who I Am and Who I Will Become*, required for the Master of Science in Teaching (MST) degree for pre-service teachers at New School University (formerly New School for Social Research) in New York City.<sup>2</sup> The opportunity to teach such a course was nothing short of a gift, a perfect fit to my aspirations as a teacher educator. Grounded in self and the world, it invited teaching to, and from, the whole person. It offered an environment conducive to examining other ways of knowing, held the promise and inspiration of personal and social agency, and provided an ideal context for an inquiry into growth and change. I will describe that context through the two main course components—personal writing and experiential learning activities—which often evoked particular kinds of growing pains in students and in me.

Focused on educational autobiography, the course was intended to guide prospective teachers toward discovery of their visions of teaching, their assumptions and beliefs about education, and their identities as learners by remembering past learning experiences. The course also explored the uses of personal writing in learning in general. Before my arrival, it had been taught only once, in the program's first year. Writing had been the primary means of inquiry, though this was not considered a writing course. As a teacher and writer of fiction and non-

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<sup>2</sup> The MST program emphasizes educational reform, social change in a pluralistic society, and an interdisciplinary curriculum. It provides site placements in public urban secondary schools, either founded as alternative or engaged in restructuring. Students have ranged in age from early 20's to late 50's, a few with some teaching experience, others directly from college, and a great many from careers in very diverse fields. By graduation, they obtain New York City Board of Education Licenses and New York State Initial Certification in their disciplines. Until 1999, the program was full-time only: yearlong intensive coursework in pedagogy and philosophy of education concurrent with in-depth school experiences in triads with a peer partner and cooperating teacher, amid a cohort of other MST students and extensive presence by university mentors. In 1999, a part-time option began and, under the direction of Dr. Wendy Kohli, a revised full-time program is underway.

fiction, I was intrigued by its potential in educational theory and writing practice and by personal narrative as a method of inquiry. I had always found nontraditional means a powerful way to burst the staid classroom bubble and used my background in the arts and my commitment to holistic learning to seek opportunities for other means of inquiry as well.

The broad theme of educational autobiography allowed me to choose texts offering an eclectic content, including autobiographical works, readings on educational psychology and philosophy, diversity education, multiple intelligence theory, emotional literacy and moral education, integrated history or science, spirituality in education, and ethnographic research, among others.<sup>3</sup> With life playing a central role, the course was intrinsically interdisciplinary, implications for teaching and learning sprouted in many directions and raised numerous pedagogical issues.

As I redesigned the course, I kept in mind that these students came from different disciplines with mixed emotional responses to the act of writing itself. Many had to adjust to the controversial notions of using personal writing in school and viewing their work as texts for inquiry. Thus, I urged them to focus on the story of each memory rather than on the angst of writing it, to consider the writing “informal,” using it to learn and to discover. Students kept journals on current class and field site experiences, wrote reading logs, and engaged in writing activities during class. The primary writing, however, was the Autobiographical Reflections, the near weekly assignments narrating past learning moments. The accounts were not limited to school-learning and therefore might involve not just teachers but also family, friends, or strangers. I always stressed the notion of audience and the writers’ responsibility to reveal only what was comfortable and appropriate. The writings often recalled painful moments, underscoring the frequency of in-school associations with the negative, including insult, trauma, and abuse. The fact of regularly sharing their writings with peers usually inspired a high level of respect, compassion, and engagement in the “believing game.”

At mid-semester, I gave an assignment in autobiographical fiction writing called the “Experimental Revisions Project,” which I had previously designed and taught in an undergraduate writing course. Fiction writing had not been used before at the MST, but in the first year, a concern had arisen about students’ difficulties in analyzing and re-envisioning their life events. At the encouragement of the founder and then director, Dr. Cynthia Onore, I adapted the Experimental Revisions Project as a catalyst for attaining greater distance. It contributed greatly to an atmosphere where our mutual growing pains could and sometimes did intersect.

The Experimental Revisions Project places fiction writing in the curriculum as a practice of reflection through a specific structure for rewriting and analyzing the same memory from different perspectives. It is informed by readings and

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<sup>3</sup> Texts used frequently included, among others, Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings' *Stories Lives Tell*, Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self*, Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School*, John Dewey's *Moral Principles in Education*, Steven Glazer's *The Heart of Learning*, and excerpts from the work of bell hooks, Jerome Bruner, Maxine Greene, Howard Gardner, Daniel Goleman, Louise Rosenblatt, and the organization Facing History and Ourselves.

discussions about genre and the indeterminacy of memory and imagination, not only as part of writing but also as critical understandings in teaching and learning. After students chose one of their memory writings to work with, I reminded them of what I had proposed earlier as a working definition of “autobiography,” i.e., the attempt to remain as close as possible to what they had perceived as happening. For the fiction, I asked that they retain the core of the action and perhaps some dialogue but attempt to re-envision the incident from the viewpoints of two other participants in the event, producing two fictional pieces from the same memory. I urged them to intentionally choose “make believe,” to engage in what I call “conscious fiction.”

The assignment’s highly structured process—not a traditional fiction writing approach—afforded most students the freedom to focus deeply on how others in the memory may have perceived the event. Despite occasional reservations, a majority each semester described changes, even dramatic shifts, in attitudes and understandings from this concentrated effort to imagine other epistemologies. They felt they could more easily consider sensitive questions in the conditional milieu of “make-believe.” Entertaining a range of perspectives through their classmates’ writings as well as their own, they found themselves considering widely divergent opinions on such social issues as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. They claimed breakthroughs in tolerance and compassion. Some said that, in years of repeated reflection on the situation, they had not conceived of a perspective beyond their own nor imagined how their behavior might have been viewed by the other participants. These insights did not necessarily move the students to new ground immediately; they did, however, offer glimpses of eventual change. For the moment, the insights were works-in-progress, sometimes accompanied by anger, confusion, or pain, as the insights exposed existing growing pains or triggered new ones.<sup>4</sup>

Exercises in mind-body-spirit awareness and experiential learning activities stimulated similar shifts in attitude and understanding. My belief that a course preparing new teachers should offer a rich environment for learning in multiple ways with diverse students at different ages inspired me each semester to try new activities as well as to draw from the repertoire I had previously used. All of the activities—music, movement, drama or art—became opportunities to learn to exercise different intelligences to unite mind, body, and spirit. They enabled research through firsthand observations and stimulated connections between theory and practice. Linking them with texts and their writings complicated discussions and provided refreshing ways to experience what Dewey frames as the means toward “solution.” Of course, I hoped they might be pleasurable as well. Many were, but not always at once.

Though the fiction writing elicited reservation, the embodied learning components aroused the most controversy, following closely behind such topics as diversity issues, emotional literacy, and spirituality in education. Despite students’ interest in nontraditional means, the challenges did loom large. In

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<sup>4</sup> Many also appreciated it as their first opportunity to write fiction in or out of school. A number expressed interest in using the project with their students, even across the curriculum, and did so in student teaching and later in their own classrooms.

experiential learning, agreeing to suspend judgment is key to participation. Even in a course and program encouraging openness to varieties of inquiry, students who theoretically embraced the concept could suffer misgivings when faced with actual tasks. Only over time could they grasp the overall purpose of the course and the relevance of all the components to each other and to the exploration of self and self-in-context.

In experiential work, age and level are critical factors. The enthusiasm and ease of children for this work dissipates gradually with each grade. By graduate school, responses vary widely. Certain activities worked well for some or even most individuals while completely failing for others. Meditation, when I began to brave it in the classroom, was both welcomed and repelled. Movement—whether stretching, yoga, qi gong, or wandering in the room during a guided memory search—was a monumental challenge. Not only do students need to consider the pedagogical value of movement exercises, they also need to deconstruct the typical classroom whose size, furnishings, lights, ventilation, and so on are beyond their individual controls. My students found liberating our class's attempt to use classroom space differently (e.g., not just rearranging seating but also adding mobility and altering ambiance). Drama-in-the-classroom, e.g., constructing a tableau or enacting a critical teaching incident, drew uneven response, but its focusing power often won students over, much like projects in art. The suggestion to use crayons, scissors, markers, and glue in a higher education setting could elicit a strong case of the "doubting game," though the lure of childhood memories usually held sway. Music was often easiest in the classroom. Scarcer than crayons in most schools, its presence elicited a kind of childhood glee.

Thus, resistance was a constant companion in the classroom, providing multiple opportunities to note the intersection of students' issues with mine. A classic example comes from an activity, the High School Tour, which I have used many times. In brief, students take a partner, leave the room (even the building) and take a walk, giving each other imaginary tours of their high schools, pointing out places and describing events. Back in class, they draw maps of their schools in journals, noting memories for later writing. This exercise usually puzzled, then delighted most students, even those reluctant to leave their seats. In an early semester of the course, it became a touchstone when, during the reflection following the activity, an older change-of-career student vociferously expressed her anger. Her high school days had been so traumatic that she suffered in revisiting them and resented the suggestion that she should. I felt myself going through all the usual complications of reaction: defensiveness and frustration along with compassion and regret. My growing pains in a new program and new course, along with personal issues, increased my vulnerability. I had not offered her an option when she resisted at the beginning, instead urging her (gently, I hoped) to give it a try. Mustering the courage to swallow my teaching pride, I invited her to speak her mind. I had never witnessed such a diatribe from a student, but astonishingly, as the class and I listened, she moved past her rage, suddenly aware that other factors more than school had created that unhealed pain. Viewing the complex entanglement, she saw that separating one from the other might permit a different look at her schooling. She could also imagine how that endeavor might offer insight into her students' lives and influ-

ence her development as a teacher.

I recall sensing what felt like a miraculous transformation in the dynamic of the classroom. Offered “deep listening,” she could then hear the rest of the community and me, as we discussed the rationale for the assignment. Freedom to express her negative response without reprehension moved her to risk exploration of those uprooted growing pains and to learn from them.

### Room for Growth

In *The Heart of Learning*, Stephen Glazer asserts that “spirituality in education is about intimacy with experience: intimacy with our perceptions—the experience of having a body; our thoughts—the experience of having a mind; and our emotions—the experience of having a heart” (2). Yet there is almost no preparation for that intimacy in the many years of traditional schooling. For some, embodied learning presents greater challenges than the usual higher education tasks. It would appear that, in our society, the learning behaviors of children—playfulness, make-believe, exuberance—are deemed so inappropriate for adults that they approach the vestigial. The sublimation of these characteristics is surely related to the myth of adulthood unencumbered by deep change, of the sort we begin in childhood but then presume to leave behind. Unprepared for the continuum of growing pains, we create yet more dichotomies and, in many ways, prime ourselves for difficulties in being able to respond in the moment.

The unpredictability of response to so many components of Autobiographical Expedition turned out to be the gift I sensed when I took the course on. Would I have been as eager, had I foreseen the turmoil that gift could cause in me? The palpable potential for resistance compelled me to rely on faith in the process and willingness to hear and attend to students’ needs. Each time I introduced an experiential learning task, I felt my growing pains ready to flare up as I braced for the skepticism so ingrained from students’ long sojourn in a domain consecrated to the cognitive. It was never easy to face the exchanges of raised eyebrows and recalcitrant glances, though humor guided my way. Humility, patience, and loving kindness didn’t always serve me; I’m sure my negative reactions were more visible than I wished. However, trepidation repeatedly surrendered to my belief in the importance of initiating iconoclastic change in classroom routine.

So much occurs beneath the markers of resistance. Often, what is expressed as boredom signals a great deal of inner activity: challenge, confusion, pain, or simply emotion, so rarely overt in the classroom. Committed to “exploratory pedagogy,” I searched for ways to understand resistance, my own and theirs, especially as a symptom of growing pains. However, intellectual awareness of our intertwining lives does not preclude the difficulty, in troubling moments, of facing the depth of my own responsibility. Naming resistance in students does not automatically help me name it in myself and face the depth of my responsibility. There are times when my own resistance—or response to theirs—is clearly at issue. Such moments point to passages I am moving through, professionally, personally, or both, still constrained by the image of teacher as “completed adult.” When students challenge me but refuse to consider my point of view, I can reach for my professional veneer, not daring to take time to read the perceptions and

emotions inside me, not allowing time for students to read their own. With repeated effort, I came to see how often my reflections have focused on their behaviors, needs, and inexperience rather than my own and how little I have expressed my conflicts and fears. That narrow view keeps us from complicating and enriching our understanding of what we are doing together. When, in fact, it is each other we resist and not the activity, where is the path to the “fresh light” Dewey promises?

The first best response, I believe, is some form of deep listening because it fosters authenticity. Deep listening can also lead to genuine dialogue about how our lives intertwine and how we can speak frankly. In such an atmosphere, I have learned over time that, though my issues must necessarily take a back seat, admitting their existence and at times even their content can reassure and inspire us all. If nothing else, taking such a stance also provides an opportunity for students also practice caretaking, deep listening, even unconditional love.

My student’s response to the High School Activity, which provides a striking example of student and teacher growing pains colliding, is echoed in many more common and fleeting moments. Our repertoire of ways to address them may not always be accessible, appropriate, or humanly possible. For all our desire to facilitate caring communities, at times, there are larger forces in effect—group growing pains, in a sense. The unique character and dynamic of each class mean that some will cohere easily while others struggle just to be together. Occasionally, entire semesters remain troubled. Even with group issues as the driving force, I have found ways that my growing pains interlock, whether from distractions of family issues or concerns about my development as a teacher or from aspects of practice I want to work on. On the other hand, another semester can be sheer delight, the difference perhaps serendipity: the chemistry, the size of the group, the fit between people and content, the spirit in the room. Or we are all at a rare moment, temporarily released from growing pains and able to risk together.

To risk showing more of my human face as a teacher has taken me a long time. Gradually gaining confidence, I began with small moments, admitting an undercurrent I brought to our interaction. Later, a serious family illness and critical events in my father’s aging forced me to share more of the contents of my preoccupation. Since then, it has become easier to share other matters, always conscious of defining the boundaries of relevance, of receiving graciously the signs of their acceptance of teacher/person-in-process as well as receiving humbly the acceptance they cannot yet give.

It can be tougher to show my human face while talking about my developing teacherhood. An explanation of professional decisions, actions, or resistances can evoke intense vulnerability. It can also enlighten my students’ teaching paths and lead to our collaboration, joint compromise, and mutual agency. Acutely aware of my “transparency”—the positive and the negative of what I model—as a teacher educator, I joke with students that in this field I am “the thing” I’m teaching. A sobering thought, really. But as students embrace more of their teaching selves, a certain camaraderie arises which affirms this as not just a choice of “right liveliness” but a labor of love. Yet teacher education only makes more visible the realities of all teaching, everywhere.

After much travail I have concluded that the only sure way to prepare myself and my students to greet growing pains as thresholds toward wholeness is also the hardest: by working towards Henderson's notion of trusting our responses in the moment, a thought as thrilling as it is unnerving. For all the good planning, teaching is always an improvisation, always a felt sense, always a venue for surprise. Students make the experience with us. Or will make it without us, if we choose to force the way.

bell hooks reminds us that students often long for "sameness or security" in a teacher, long "to find the absence of mystery [. . .] the absence of imperfection in the teacher," the very imperfection "so crucial to the teacher's capacity to know," i.e., as students need to be known (129). Teaching a course so close to the bone has brought the mirror of my imperfection closer. In a setting where students continually gave gifts of memory to me and to each other, I could recognize my own growing pains *in media res*. I was part of the expedition, and, as they wrote and rewrote their own autobiographies as well as each other's, they just as surely wrote and rewrote mine, re-creating all our selves in deeper and broader contexts. Yet, just as I'm still occasionally embarrassed to admit to certain growing pains, I sometimes forget that my students are as well and that we all, learners of any age, need to be known through patience, compassion, freedom, and unconditional love. It all works best when I can ask for care as well as give it, express my reservations as well as listen to theirs, refrain from hiding my imperfections as well as generously accept the revelation of their own. I lean now towards teaching Maxine Greene's words as a mutual mantra: "I am who I am—not yet" (Pinar 1). Students or teachers, we meet and move together in the throes of change. We may as well do so in a "fresh light." ☺

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# A Poetics of Student Writing

Dennis Young

*Thus we begin to recognize in ourselves that eros and psyche are not mere figures in a tale, not merely configurations of archetypal components, but are two ends of every psychic process. They always imply and require each other. We cannot view anything psychologically without an involvement with it: we cannot be involved with anything without it entering our soul.*

— James Hillman *The Myth of Analysis*

Perhaps the most overlooked aspect of student writing is the poetic or aesthetic. Poetic writing clearly involves more than the strict literary definition, also including prose that pushes the boundaries of expression, that works imagistically, that speaks with passion, that works at the level of soul. It is writing that has the powerful ability to open up access to worlds and insights. The “poetics” of my title refers then to the soul-making, aesthetic dimension of student writing. The word soul—the best translation of the Greek word *psyche*—resonates with possibilities for describing what takes place when students grapple with perspective, subjectivity, and interpretation. Soul, with its rich tradition of cultural and literary connotation, refers to aesthetics, imagination, attitude, a way of being in the world, not a substance or thing itself. Soul involves the imaginative possibilities of a reflective perspective, “a *deepening* of events into experience” (Hillman, *Re-visioning* x).

The student work I examine in the first half of this essay reveals a passionate urgency that attends serious reflection on writing, learning, and being itself, revealing that students are stunningly capable of penetrating insight and imaginative power. Coming to terms with this level of discourse necessitates hermeneutical inquiry: this means I have to let the “text speak” (Gadamer, “Writing” 65) by seeking textual understanding but also self-understanding. In the second half of the essay, I develop an interpretive frame, attempting what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons” (a notion I’ll return to), the goal being to open up a productive dialogue concerning student writing. So this essay is about three students’ attempts at gaining self-understanding in language and my endeavour to engage the dialogue that their writing calls for.

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## Reflection as Insight

At the very end of each semester in my writing classes, I ask students to compose an in-class essay reflecting on themselves as writers. This is the one unrevised and ungraded essay of the term. By encouraging students to write about the changes and growth they experienced as writers, learners, and thinkers, I hope they will internalize their learning experience and make meaning their own. “We had the experience but missed the meaning,” T. S. Eliot says in the last of the *Four Quartets* (133). Reflection helps us to recover meaning, to overcome forgetfulness, to get to what happened, to discover and uncover.<sup>1</sup> Reflection, James Hillman reminds us, literally means a “bending back” from the perceptual stimulus in favor of a psychic image. It is a “turning inward” to images and experiences of soul, an act of “becoming conscious” related to eros (*Myth* 84).

Its pedagogical value is clear; reflection is a poetic vehicle for soul-making. As Kathleen Blake Yancey points out in *Reflection in the Writing Class*, “Reflection makes possible a new kind of learning as well as a new kind of teaching” (8). This *new kind of learning* especially interests me. Reflection, unlike much writing in the academic setting, requires that students stop, call their experience to mind, and develop a consciousness of their work. Their essays are often insightful and engaging as students interiorize the learning process. The tenor of the writing changes, the associations often leading to what Gaston Bachelard calls “intimate space” as students recontextualize their learning within their larger life histories. Although I ask them only to consider their work during the course of the semester, students often go much deeper into themselves and their life histories, framing images of struggle, pain, family entanglements, educational dilemmas, and identity. The first is by Christa.<sup>2</sup>

I wanted to understand the complexities of life. I wanted to be one of the few to obtain the secret to a happy life. I felt that studying philosophy would create a common bond or a sense of unified relatedness between myself and others [. . .] I will never forget when I first told my father about my decision to become a philosophy major. His words will echo throughout my brain forever: “And what the hell are you going to do with that degree?” my father screamed.

Reflection entails a kind of descent into, a *discovery* of oneself. Christa goes on to write about her “quest for learning” and *descends* to an earlier psychological place: “My first memory of craving knowledge was when I was four years old.” She was learning a second language, Greek, and remembers how thrilling it was to “define words on the spot because of my knowledge of another language.” She then discusses her decision to major in philosophy and her father’s

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting here that for Greek thought the word for truth is *aletheia*, that is, *revealing, uncovering, or disclosure* (Heidegger, *Question 36*). The word is mythic. It means against or contrary to *Lethe*, the river of oblivion in the underworld of death.

<sup>2</sup> All students that I cite have enthusiastically granted me permission to use their work in this essay. They are given pseudonyms.

subsequent stern resistance. She endured his repeated complaints, feeling humiliation every time she saw him for over a year, but she did not relinquish her original desire to learn. She then says something amazing: "In retrospect, my life seems like a blur with the exception of one thing. My quest for learning remains constant."

Christa may not have been the best writer in the class, but she epitomizes an *insistence* in many students' lives, articulating what so many feel, think, and imagine—that learning is desire, that it provides a focus, that life is "a blur" except for the motivation to learn. She bravely resisted her father's harsh authority to pursue her *calling*, her intellectual vocation, the center of her concerned attention. Christa displays the logic of love, not the logic of normalcy, adjustment, success, or even "happiness." An image of her destiny is packed into this little fragment, a revelation that she simply cannot be who she is without following the intellectual urgency to pursue philosophy (the love of wisdom), to think for herself about what truly matters to her being. I do not want to claim too much from one example, but I see hints of this proclivity in student writing that expresses the need to resist authoritarian strictures and follow a spark of inspiration. Christa made her writing the occasion for engaging intimate and passionate concerns.

Jennifer, an extremely shy and private student who was quite reluctant in the beginning to share her work, slowly opened up during the course of the semester. In almost every piece she wrote, images of her Chinese-American identity somehow came into play. She grappled constantly with her "dual perspective" of Chinese and American values, unsure about her true identity.

When I began this course I had hoped to discover how to control my unruly writings and to tame them into submission but I learned more than expected. In the past I had learned to turn away from my cultural identity instead of embracing it. I kept my life to myself and was abashed at sharing my secrets. Yet, in this class I began to see the glimmerings of what I could possibly accomplish if only I gave myself the chance. [. . .] I can see how my focus has turned from the inward to the outward. No longer concerned with the daily rituals of my life, I have become enmeshed in the net of my identity and who it is I am masquerading as. There are still so many things that I have to sort out but I seem to have found a starting point with this class. So, if my punctuation and grammar still isn't ideal, at least I know my purpose is.

She ends with, "I guess that's what I really *needed* to learn." Jennifer realized her "outward" movement as a kind of assertion of identity and being, a vital psychologizing of experience. Note that Jennifer characterizes the movement toward self-knowledge and being as outward, not inward, a movement away from the boundaries of the withdrawn "daily rituals" of mundane existence toward a complex, multifaceted "net of identity." She revises herself first by recognizing the "masquerade" and sees writing as a starting point for further investigation of identity. Jennifer, like Christa, reveals, recovers, reclaims. Both portray intellectual struggle—the struggle to become who and what they *know* and *feel* they are.

We can call this nothing less than soul-work: the act of putting ourselves face to face with what Gadamer calls openness to language to gain reflective momentum in the process of *Bildung*, self-creation through education (*Truth* xxiii). Writing, after all, has a way of putting us face to face with what we most wish to deny or forget, if it approaches Heideggerian *aletheia*—i.e., truth, unhiddenness, what does not escape notice, what is not easy to forget—that arises from the disclosure that writing makes available.

The very process of writing sometimes seems to mirror another process, that of choosing one's path (or to put it another way, following one's fate). Another reflective student, Daniel, reminds me that revision involves much more than re-seeing an individual piece of prose, that it often involves revising one's values, goals and purposes.

From the start of this course, I knew that I enjoyed writing. Things have not much changed from that first day on that point. But there have been significant changes in other realms of my life (and possible career as a writer). I now know to look at my college career in a whole new light, all from the angle of a writer doing revisions. I have had many disappointments in my long student life, but never did they usually have to do with my ability to write.

He goes on to relate the event of getting a "C" on a paper in anthropology (his major) that he had worked harder on than any paper he'd ever composed. Because of his dedication to writing and scholarship, it was a "humiliation," and, he says, "I almost gave up on school and my ability to be a coherent, clear person." Arising from a moment of crisis, this brilliant insight suggests that clarity and coherence are as much a style of consciousness—a way of being—as they are a writing style. Daniel realised that he had a "second chance. And even more importantly, I have a third and a fourth and a fifth, etc. chances. [. . .] Even though I was grabbed by the ghoul of bad writing last semester, I had the ability to banish him."

Daniel's recognition that revision involves more than rhetorical choices, that one revises one's life stories, struck him as revelatory. He successfully revised his story of academic failure to create a new story that, as he says, "allows me to talk." "And," he triumphantly ends his meditation, "to come to this idea is pure bliss, because I actually feel whole as a writer." This is a person who has connected writing to life, thereby creating a new world for himself.

"A simple image, if it is new, will open an entire world," Bachelard suggests (134). Revising our story makes the world new, too. Their imagistic language resonates with archetypal importance. By paying attention to the images themselves, we perceive an attitude, not an argument. Students turn despair and pain into images that they can live with. This is the language not of ego but of soul, constituting acts of *poeisis*. Christa's *quest for learning* against the *blur* of banal existence, Jennifer's *desire and need to learn* that provided a *starting point* for encountering *the net of identity* and the *masquerading* of the unregenerative self, Daniel's recognition that *revision* constitutes the fitting metaphor for self-understanding and the subsequent *bliss* of feeling *whole*—these images are the language of soul, allegories of identity. They validate Emerson's idea that

The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. [. . .] Good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. (51-52)

I see this “spontaneous imagery” in these student pieces; they enact the blend of past experience and the immediacy of the soul in action in their reflections.

Recourse to analytical ego psychology with its abstractions, personality indices, types, complexes, and temperaments simply will not suffice to describe what is going on in these images of psyche. Hillman points out that “Every psychological system rests upon a metapsychology, a set of implicit assumptions about the nature of the soul” (*Re-visioning* 200). Could it be that our system of education in general and of the writing class in particular also rests upon assumptions about the nature of soul? To neglect the psychological—or soul—dimension of student experience is to neglect a critical strand in their development, seriously distorting our perspective.

What’s so striking about these reflections is that Christa, Jennifer, and Daniel used the occasion to create a new story. The worlds they open in their reflections reveal writing not so much as power, mastery, and control but as *poesis* (Greek for *imaginative making*) and soul-making. They manage to connect their learning of writing to the essential psychic actuality and insistences in their lives, disclosing images of the soul in action, reminding us of the inherent aesthetic experience of meaning, what Gadamer calls the “truth” of beauty. Gadamer suggests that “the distinguishing mark of the beautiful [is that] it draws directly to itself the desire of the human soul, is founded in its mode of being [. . .]. That being is self-presentation [. . .] an event [of understanding]” (*Truth* 439). Student reflections tell the story that self is not a constant, stable entity but something one becomes in the act of *poesis*, by weaving the threads of multiplicity through writing to help us become who we are. These students engage the aesthetic dimension of themselves, simultaneously encountering eros, the desire that makes dialogue and learning possible.

### Interpreting the Writing Psyche

How do we *take* these student utterances; how do we *interpret* them? What do they teach us about teaching and learning writing? What do they suggest to writing teachers who wish to better understand—and we all wish to better understand—students’ struggles? Looked at a certain way, these excerpts are as appealing and problematic as literary texts, provided we treat them as images of students’ minds in action and provided we ourselves enact self-reflection as a way of negotiating the texts. These pieces are imaginative renderings of psyche in the process of learning. I’ve called this writing “soul-work” (following Hillman), and I wish to extend this characterization to include the Heideggerian notion of language as “dwelling,” a way of “being-in-the-world.” In *On the Way to Language* Heidegger speaks of the transformative potential of language: “All reflective thinking is poetic and all poetry is in turn a kind of thinking” (136). By intimately associating reflection with the poetic, Heidegger emphasizes that lan-

guage constitutes *Dasein* (literally, “there being” or “being there”) or the “gathering” of consciousness of being. This notion provides insight into student struggles with language and identity in their texts. In an essay representing Heidegger as an ally of composition studies, Judith Halden-Sullivan points out that “[T]he language of writing, as the saying of Being, discloses human openness to the truth, showing in every nuance the writer’s being-in-the-world” (48). Several other composition theorists have appropriated phenomenology and hermeneutics to interpret the writing class and the educational project of composition studies (see Gere). Briefly, they insist that Heidegger’s views of language—and their elaboration by Gadamer—provide a way to understand student work. Philosophical hermeneutics’ emphasis on language as constituting consciousness makes it particularly congenial to writing pedagogy because, as Heidegger insists in one way or another throughout his work, “Language is the foundation of human being. [. . .] We are, then, within language and with language before all else. [. . .] The point is to experience the unbinding bond within the web of language” (*On the Way* 112, 113). Gadamer in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* expands on Heidegger’s hermeneutical perspective, saying, “Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world” (3). Hillman’s insistence on a *poetic* basis of mind, while different from Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s philosophical perspective in its emphasis on myth, psychoanalysis, and reflection, nonetheless, is enhanced and deepened by hermeneutics’ emphasis on language as the aesthetic rendering of being itself.

Read psychologically, as I’ve suggested, these student texts show that learning is a creative, poetic act. They present images of struggle and effort, confronting as they do resistance to contrary forces, whether resistant parents, self- and culturally-limiting notions of identity, or academic systems. They are vignettes—imagistic portraits of student learning—and they are psychological images or, better, images of psyche. Authentically encountering these images requires what Gadamer calls the “fusion of horizons” (*Truth* xix) that occurs when both teachers and students grasp the immediacy of meaning in the text. “The fusion of horizons occurs,” Brenda Deen Schildgen points out, “when dialogue has actually happened” (39). Hermeneutics and psychological theory, then, are preconditions for grasping possible textual meanings. A theory of psyche for teachers means involvement and engagement with the drama of students’ emotional and mental processes as they learn, an act that Gadamer calls “intersubjectivity.” We can imagine ourselves as a part of the whole, participating in student work rather than operating at an analytical distance. The words of interpretation cannot be isolated in any rigorously analytical way from the words of student texts themselves. The interpretive act is never conducted from a distance but is a subjective process of making the text speak by enacting dialogue and reconstruction. “The genuine reality of the hermeneutical process,” Gadamer says, “seems to me to encompass the self-understanding of the interpreter as well as what is interpreted” (*Philosophical* 58).

Is there a writing teacher alive who cannot identify with at least one of these student’s disclosures that writing is an act of resistance and self-creation, a dynamic by which to embody and interpret the needs of psyche? Christa’s at first

timid rebellion against her father's business mentality serves to found her being *against* what she sees as contrary to her calling to learn and to know. Jennifer sees writing as a way to help her embrace her contrary cultural identities in order to assert an actively imaginative self. Daniel imagines his life as a text that can be revised, just as his papers *and* his identity as a student/learner can be revised. As writers, they open themselves to the possibilities of self-projection, recognizing in their work that there is something unfinished in them, that there is still more to be said, and that writing pushes the boundaries of being, propelled by the desire to "know thyself."

Eros, desire, then constitutes the center of our concerned attention. We desire knowledge to fill a void, a deficiency, a lack. The word education suggests as much. *E-ducat-ion* means "to lead out"; "ducat" corresponds to "duct," a passage way, a void to be filled, not as in banking or depositing or filling up but rather fulfilling psyche with the passion of learning and comprehending. Learners, with the help of caring teachers, lead themselves out of one way of thinking, one way of life, into another; they lead themselves out of childhood into newer versions of themselves as adults, and so learning is often fraught with pain. Desire is the impetus propelling the process of leading out. The hermeneutical act of both reading and writing (represented mythically by Hermes, god of messages, hermeneutics, and writing) is infused with the desire (eros) for understanding. Eros is the presiding genius behind the awakening of the imagination.

Reflective writing, the descent into the soul's imaginative world, constitutes a psychic urge, a thirst, an all-consuming desire. These instincts and energies unerringly veer toward Psyche as embodiment of the knowing soul, the activity of the intellect, the emotionally charged urgency and delight of dialogue. Eros brings us to inferiority, to the recognition that we by ourselves are not enough, that we need much more: "The soul hungers for ideas" (Hillman, *Re-visioning* 119). The soul's wants and the desire to learn inescapably point to eros, that which it seems to want most and yet which is also the origin of what we want. Like Martin Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" implies a kind of eros—a desire to know, a desire to enact dialogue with an other. "The genuine researcher," Gadamer reminds us, "is motivated by a desire for knowledge and nothing else" (*Philosophical* 10). I would say the same about the genuine student writer.

## Genuine Writers

Genuine student writers often reveal more to us than our theories of writing and learning allow. Each of them—Christa, Jennifer, and Daniel—made out of the final writing assignment a hermeneutical occasion to *found* themselves in the world. They went deeply into language, while at the same time *projecting* themselves in the Heideggerian sense of the word. The writing was not therapeutic but foundational to their identities, a way of making sense of themselves as learners, thinkers, human beings. Each wonderfully illustrates that *desire* underpins learning. Recall Christa's remark: "my life seems like a blur with the exception of one thing. My quest for learning remains constant." And Jennifer: "I know my purpose [. . .]. [. . .] that's what I really needed to learn." And Daniel: "To come



to this idea [that revision also involves self-reformation] is pure bliss.” We can rush over these gems, even ignore them, but in doing so we miss much of the poetic force of students’ intellectual lives and the existential drama that characterizes their learning.

My experience tells me that students generally do not respond casually to assignments asking them to reflect on their learning; I find little inauthentic “idle chatter” apparent in these pieces. Learning in school provides a *starting point*, a way of *being in the world*. Students appraise their learning in relation to the life-world, seeing school as inextricably bound up with their identities, transforming themselves in the process of learning and reflecting. Their eloquence and passion move me. They remind me that, clearly more than a preparation for a career or one more hurdle on the way to imagined success, education—and, in particular, writing—has value for anyone coming to self-awareness.

If I were to follow a trend of composition theorists wishing to eliminate autobiography and personal writing in the writing class, I would miss out on the imagistic depth and resonance of student writing; what a tremendous loss this would be. Mike Rose, Victor Villanueva, Stephen Greenblatt, and Jane Tompkins all testify to the power of reflective, autobiographical writing in making sense of their struggles in the academic world. Reflection on learning—which is always autobiographical—clearly has a place in the writing class, for it allows students the chance to make crucial connections between the learning of academic subjects and their psychological lives. They in part create themselves in the universe of the written word.

I have been promoting here a *poetic basis of mind*, a mind that works imaginatively, metaphorically, poetically, associationally. Ego is not the primary concern here, but soul is.<sup>3</sup> By psychologizing the writing class, I have become more sensitive to student struggles as writers, learners, and thinkers. The very process of writing this essay has made manifest an awareness of myself as a teacher who himself is involved in “soul-work.” As Parker Palmer notes, to become a more effective teacher requires the kind of self-reformation and self-knowledge that we usually ask of students. He suggests moving, life-changing teachers listen to, connect with, and engage students’ inner lives to fuse horizons. The classroom itself, he emphasizes, is a space where the “inner landscape” of both students and teachers emerge. “To educate,” he says, “is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world” (6). By attending to the soul-making, poetic dimension of student writing and promoting their efforts to write about the complexities of learning writing, we can better guide our students in the inner journey that is education itself. ☺

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<sup>3</sup> See Nancy Welch’s *Getting Restless* for a sustained critique of “American ego psychology” and its pervading influence on composition studies.

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# Being There: Revising the Discourse of Emotion and Teaching

Dale Jacobs

What is the relationship between emotion and pedagogy? What is the place of affect in the composition classroom? How can we think about emotion in relation to our teaching and learning? My own experiences as a student and teacher have shown me the importance of acknowledging what both students and I are experiencing, whether it be joy, sorrow, anger, or indignation. We are not, after all, automatons; what happens in class is always affected by the complex relationships we share, the ways in which the class fits (or does not fit) into our lives, and the emotions/memories/experiences each of us brings with us. Further, it seems to me that if education is to be integrated into the lives of students, it's important to think about learning as active and creative, embracing the whole of the student, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. It's exactly this idea of education that Myles Horton and Paulo Freire discussed in their conversation that became *We Make the Road by Walking*. Horton describes "a holistic approach to education" in which "the way people live [is] more important than any class or subject" (168). Such an educational experience is participatory, according to Freire, one in which "in studying [we] also get the pleasure of playing" (172).

It takes a teacher who is fully engaged in the classroom to create an atmosphere that allows for this kind of holistic emphasis. Engaged teachers, as bell hooks writes, must "practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit" (21). In other words, to allow students' emotions to enter into the classroom, we as teachers have to also allow our own emotions to become part of the mix. Such teachers can nurture what I see as the important connection between emotion and intellect in the social network of the classroom. The problem, however, is that too many of these teachers "burn out," leaving the profession after only a few years. This essay seeks to explore the fine line between engagement and "burnout," between continual presence and eventual absence.

The issue of teacher burnout came home to me during the spring of 1998 as I was teaching a graduate course in Research Methods in Composition and Rhetoric. As I read through the students' reading journals towards the end of the semester, I came across the following entry written by Judy:

[Nancy] Welch talks about the "self-sacrificing image of the female teacher." Boy, could I relate to that! That is why I had to stop teaching this year. I have learned to recognize that I am a person who

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goes overboard with everything I do, and teaching is no exception. I spent hours and hours grading papers so that I had customized comments on each paper that I thought would add to the instructional experience of each individual student. I went to class early every day to meet with students, stayed late every day, and met with students in my office hours. Last year was the worst because I was teaching 10 hours per week, plus working as the tutor coordinator and the retention specialist. I was up until midnight every night writing comments on their papers because I couldn't settle for giving my students anything less than what I thought they deserved—my undivided attention. Forget having a personal life. I realized something had to give, so I met with the college president, who had hired me primarily to create the retention program at my school, and told him if that's what he wanted me to do, he had to give me release time from teaching. That solved the problem, but not really. If I ever teach again, I know I will be the same self-sacrificing teacher [. . .]. How can you teach writing and not be self-sacrificing? How do you achieve the balance between being a good teacher and still having time for yourself?

At the time, I thought I knew what to say to Judy, and I wrote a marginal comment acknowledging that these were tough questions, but that there were concrete steps that one could take to address these concerns. It was a sentence that I'm sure I thought was an incisive comment about juggling the workload of teaching composition. In my haste, I failed to realize that this standard "advice to a novice teacher" completely missed the point of Judy's journal by focusing on practical methods instead of on her as a person. Moreover, my comment was made with little apparent self doubt, with a degree of certainty that belied what I actually felt about this issue in my own teaching life. In retrospect, it is the kind of comment that I would studiously avoid making to a student about his or her writing because it implies that there is a right and a wrong way to approach it. So why would I make such a comment to Judy about her teaching, implying that I held knowledge that she had yet to attain? This is exactly the kind of transmission of knowledge that I argue against in my teaching life. What purpose did such a comment have in the context of this situation? What is the effect of such comments when they are made by those of us who teach and mentor teachers?

In retrospect, I think what is also happening in this note and in my response is that Judy is expressing what Alison M. Jaggar calls "outlaw emotions," emotional responses which have been constructed by the dominant culture or, in this case, the culture of the institution as unacceptable. Jaggar writes, "People who experience conventionally unacceptable, or what I call 'outlaw,' emotions often are subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the status quo [. . .]. Outlaw emotions are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values" (180). That is, it is deemed unacceptable for teachers, especially female teachers, within higher education to express the kinds of emotions that underpin Judy's journal: anxiety, frustration, fear of losing control/agency, fatigue. The institutional expectation/desire, however, is that Judy and others like her will do the intellectual and emotional work

expected of them as teachers of required first-year courses, but that they will not voice any emotions associated with dissatisfaction in regard to their positions. She is, in effect, expected to be seen, but not heard, occupying a role whose boundaries are circumscribed by the institutional discourses about what it means to be a female teacher of first-year writing.

Charles Anderson's teasing out of the term "suture" helps me to think more about the construction of teachers' subjectivities. In "Suture, Stigma, and the Pages that Heal," Anderson writes that suture is "a term denoting the process by which we, as viewers of a given scene or participants in a particular discourse, move toward and are fastened into the subject position" (60). The discourse of the academy thus effectively fastens teachers like Judy into subject positions that not only strip them of agency, but also discourage them from expressing the emotions that surround such loss of agency. Anderson continues, "Suture inserts us into discourses that appear to give our lives coherence, wholeness, and meaning, but in that process, they also wound and break us, separate and alienate us, pacify us, and expose us to losses so severe that we can easily cease to be" (61). The very discourse of commitment to teaching, of being engaged in the work and the lives of the students, with which I opened this essay, can both provide meaning and alienate teachers, stripping them of their agency. Such is especially the case when this discourse is coupled with a wider institutional discourse in which it is not possible to express one's emotional responses to the demands of teaching. My response to Judy's journal reinforced her situation by perpetuating the discourse within which she had been constructed as a teacher; so powerful was the discursive pull towards this kind of response that it occurred to me immediately as the way to "deal with" Judy's eruption of emotion. Need it have done so? Could I have engaged in a dialogue about her concerns that might have instead allowed her to revise the discourse within which she was situated, thereby altering her subject position? Could the script have been changed? I'll return to that question later, but for now I would like to describe the effects and consequences of my response.

Despite all my thinking and writing about the importance of the whole person in the pedagogical relationship, I had glossed over what Judy was saying and inserted a timeworn answer to a very real problem. In thinking more about my response, I realize now that I wrote the kind of response that Brooke Horvath, in an early discussion of responding to student writing, termed "summative." My response represented an inadvertent evaluation of Judy as a teacher that found her lacking because she was unable to cope with the workload required of her and the attendant emotions that she experienced. I took it upon myself to supply the right answer, to, in effect, justify myself as the more experienced teacher and to negate her expression of emotion, to overwrite her threatening "outlaw emotions." Whether conscious or unconscious, such a response was an attempt to foreclose any further dialogue about this issue, to avoid having to face my own very real concerns about the issue of burnout in my own teaching life. In retrospect, I now see my response both as a way for me to keep the issue at bay and thus deny the possibility of my own burnout and as a perpetuation of the discourse in which Judy's subject position as a teacher had been fixed. My response was thus a way to deny emotion, both in myself and in Judy.

In writing my comments back to Judy, I had also not seen the implications of a male teacher dismissing or appearing to dismiss a female teacher's concerns about burnout. Without really thinking, I had taken on not only the role of the knowing, more experienced teacher, but also that of knowing the patriarch, condescendingly dispensing knowledge about how the world of teaching *really* worked. At the time I did not see that the institutional discourse in which her subjectivity as a teacher was constructed was itself a gendered discourse which governed who was allowed to speak and in what context.

In my efforts to avoid the issue at hand through cursory attention to it, I had not only re-created the kind of gender dynamic I sought to help eliminate, but I had also completely forgotten about the connections between labor issues and gender in composition which form part of the discursive structure that disciplines the emotions of teachers like Judy. As Eileen Schell articulates, the "ethic of care," often associated with women in the profession, can become a factor leading to continued exploitative labor conditions. Without a doubt, those conditions were present for Judy; she was expected to perform two jobs, plus teach a class in which she describes herself practicing what might be termed "an ethic of care." Though Judy did have an administration willing to deal with her concerns, I had still missed the implications of what she had written to me. It was easy for me to dismiss her concerns since I was not expected to perform administrative work and had a relatively light teaching load. More importantly, my position and gender prevented me from seeing the ways in which I, as a teacher and mentor of teachers, was implicated in this discourse about teaching. In other words, I had not tried to empathize with Judy's position(s), but rather had written a response derived solely from my own location. On many levels, I was not seeing the issues of gender that her journal raised.

In writing this kind of summative response, I reduced teaching to a kind of product, instead of acknowledging that it, like writing, is an ongoing process and that dialogue between teachers, like dialogue between writers, is valuable and sustaining. I might rather have engaged in what Horvath calls "formative" response in an effort to promote dialogue and focus on teaching as an ongoing and dynamic process. Formative response focuses not only on the process (of writing or teaching), but also on the person. If I had been able to give such a response, I would have been attending to Judy's multiple locations in an effort to engage her in dialogue about a difficult issue to which there are no right or wrong answers. In such a dialogue, I perhaps could have helped her to see alternative scripts for revising her subject position as a teacher. Of course, to do so would have meant exposing my own fears about burnout, attending to not only Judy's emotions, but to my own as well. Just as Judy practiced being vulnerable in her teaching and in her journal to me, so should I have been engaged in the same ways in my response to her; such a relationship of reciprocity allows a space for us to begin to revise the ways we are situated in the world. Doing so would have encouraged dialogue between us and laid open the connections between emotion and teaching, thereby fracturing the discourse in which the expression of emotion about teaching is seen as an unacceptable act. Such a move opens up a space in which we can situate "outlaw emotions in relation to those of others" and begin "the process of critically reflecting on those emotions, a process that opens a way to a

critical social practice” (Payne 148). By revising the discourse surrounding teaching so that emotion talk becomes acceptable, we perhaps use the expression of emotion as a starting point for critique and social change. I would like to return to this idea later as I work through possible strategies that we can use as teachers, mentors, and teachers of teachers, but for now, I examine how Judy resisted my initial response and pushed me to reconsider what I had written to her. Without her insistence that I revise my response, and thus my position, I could not have begun to think about these issues.

Two weeks after writing my initial comments, I sat at my desk reading another set of journals. As I read Judy’s, I began to understand how inappropriate my response had been. She wrote,

In closing, I’d like to tell you a story in response to something you wrote in the margins of my reading journal last week. . . . Have you ever seen the movie *A Christmas Story*? It’s a wonderful movie about a little boy named Ralphie who more than anything wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas. He asks his mother, and she says, “No, Ralphie, you’ll shoot your eye out!” When his teacher asks his class to write a “theme” about what they want for Christmas, he writes about the BB gun. He expects to get an A+ on the paper. He gets a C and the teacher writes “P.S. You’ll shoot your eye out!” So, as a last resort, Ralphie decides to go see Santa at the mall and ask him for the gun. He waits in a long, long line to see Santa, and when he finally gets up to ask Santa for the gun, even *Santa* says, “You’ll shoot your eye out, kid!”

Well, I tell you this story for a reason . . . you did a “You’ll shoot your eye out!” to me in my journal last week. I wrote about the self-sacrificing teacher explaining that I am just that because I can not find the balance between teaching the way I feel like I need to teach—which is putting my whole self into it—and preserving control of my life and not letting teaching consume it. *Everyone* tells me I need to hold back or I will burn out. In fact, my supervisor calls me “burnout waiting to happen.” I know this; in fact, I can *feel* burnout slowly seeping into my being. But, I don’t know what to do about it because I don’t know how to *not* give my all to my job. Even when I was a camp counselor, probably the most fun, care-free job in the world, I took my worries about my kids home with me! So I wrote about this in my journal last week to appeal to you for advice, and you wrote, “Be careful or you’ll burn out.” I *know* that. . . . help! What can I do about it?

Not only did my comment not seriously address Judy’s concerns, it was actually dismissive of them. It’s clear in reading this entry that she was trying to think through what it means to put her whole self into teaching while still maintaining the rest of her life, trying to find a balance that allows for integration between her location as a teacher and the other multiple locations in her life. How could she remain engaged in her teaching, but avoid becoming consumed

by it? How could she maintain some level of control and agency? I suspect that it is not only the workload that pushes her and other teachers out of the profession, but rather the burden of emotional investment in the classroom and in the students. In fact, Regina Paxton Foehr suggests that it is a complex of fears, including the fear of a loss of control and a fear of not being prepared, that causes strain that “can quickly lead to shattered self-esteem, burnout, and the decision to leave the profession” (336). It is the relationships involved in being an engaged teacher and the emotional energy that is needed to sustain them that are so draining.

So why am I espousing a discourse which encourages teachers to be fully engaged with their students, both intellectually and emotionally? Didn't I say earlier that such a discourse of teaching can contribute to the problem? Didn't I agree with Schell about “the costs of caring”? Why not simply advocate the kind of emotional dissociation often recommended in the professions of medicine and social work? As I see it, however, the problem lies not in the emotional investment that teachers make in engaging fully in the life of the classroom and in the lives of their students, but in the accompanying institutional discourse which does not allow for the expression of emotion about teaching. Instead, I would argue that full engagement in reciprocal relationships with our students is absolutely necessary in the classroom. As Freire writes in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, “hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy” (69). Hope is a reciprocal relationship, but one that is demanding and, potentially, emotionally exhausting, especially within the labor structures of higher education in which many people, especially marginalized teachers of first-year writing, teach far too many students per semester under far from adequate working conditions. Perhaps, though, such a relationship of reciprocity, of dialogue about teaching would allow us to engage in critical hope for change in the institutional discourse about teaching and in the material circumstances of teachers like Judy.

As Judy says, even when she was a camp counselor, she would continually bring home her worries about the kids. So it's not surprising that she continues to do so as a teacher. My flip answer about workload demeaned her very real and legitimate concerns. And yet, even if I had understood her question, what would I have said? What is the answer to this problem? How do we theorize the thin line between being invested and being overwhelmed? How do we integrate the emotionality of classroom social practice into our multiply positioned lives without it becoming the sole focus of our lives? How do we “practice being vulnerable” without becoming damaged? How do we maintain our presence in ways that will not become the harbinger of future absence? How do we help teachers like Judy revise their subject positions as teachers without erasing that portion of their identities entirely?

In response to Judy's second journal, I apologized for appearing dismissive and acknowledged in writing my own apprehensions about walking the line between engagement and burnout. Unfortunately, accompanying that acknowledgment was practical advice about taking breaks from teaching and cultivating out-



side interests. Again, I slipped into the role of experienced teacher dispensing wisdom, a strategy which now seems designed to evade the real issue and can be seen as further complicity in the discourse which I am arguing needs to be revised. However, at the end of the note, I had sense enough to reconsider the certainty of my comments and re-open the dialogue with Judy. I wrote, "As teachers, we need to be fully there for our students, but we also need to take care of ourselves. There's no easy solution and everyone will figure out a different way to deal with it. My only advice is that you need to make sure you look after yourself. Let's talk more in person." In her second journal, Judy forced me to foster uncertainty and to acknowledge my own doubts and fears about this very real issue. In doing so, we were able to begin to talk about teaching as a process that happens within the multiple locations of our lives.

At our next class meeting, I talked to Judy at length about her concerns and about my initial response to them. To be honest, I don't remember what I said to her, but in retrospect, I'm sure I did little more than confirm her sense of how hard it is and tell her that she needed to make time for herself and the rest of her life. The important thing is that we talked and both acknowledged that emotion is part of the process of teaching, just as it is part of our lives. This kind of dialogic reflection, while difficult, was more useful than any canned response I could have given. A week later, she addressed our conversation in the final journal for the semester:

First of all, I want to thank you again for talking to me and for taking my question about how to prevent burn out seriously. I've been thinking about what you said, and I've been trying harder this week to leave my work at work. Part of my problem is that I know if I don't do some of my work at home, I'll have too much to do the next morning when I get to work, and then I'll have more work to bring home the next night. I've been trying not to think about that this week, and it has actually helped. Then this weekend, because we didn't have much reading, I was able to take some time to relax and go out with my husband. That was nice and has whetted my appetite for the fun things I'll be able to do in my free time when I'm finished with school. Anyway, I just wanted to let you know that I appreciated your advice and that it seems to be helping a little already.

What's important here, I think, is that I finally acknowledged the emotion that was behind what Judy had written, both the initial complex of emotions that surrounded her experience as a teacher and the anger at my dismissal of her concerns. And that led me to actually listen to what she was saying, to try to help her understand the complex connections between her location as a teacher and her other multiple locations and the emotions involved in the process of teaching. In other words, I began to practice empathy, what psychologist Daniel Goleman describes as "actually hearing the feelings *behind* what is being said" (145). Despite the credit Judy gives to me, I'm convinced that it wasn't necessarily what I had to say, but the act of listening that was important. And, while such initial steps were important in beginning my process of thinking about how to help teach-

ers think through their positions and experiences as teachers, I now think that I could have been more effective in my engagement with this very real problem.

A thin line exists between engagement and burnout. I've felt it myself, though in the past I didn't want to acknowledge it because it was too painful to admit, too difficult to see myself as not completely in control. I was forgetting, of course, that emotion is by definition outside of logical control and that emotion that is subsumed by intellect is no longer really emotion. I'm not saying that intellect should yield to emotion, which is nothing but an inversion of the usual binary that is created between the two, but rather that the two should be acknowledged as facets of the whole person, two ways of learning from and responding to our experiences. Burnout is that step beyond the exhaustion that all engaged teachers feel at various points in the semester: when exhaustion gives way to impossibility, when it seems that the only way to deal with things is to simply walk away, especially when the expression of such emotion is deemed unacceptable within the institutional culture where we live and work. Perhaps burnout is the inability to address the emotionality of the classroom and our relationships with students, the inability to keep exhaustion under control by not allowing emotion completely to override intellect through a kind of detachment from the situation. Avoiding such a response is never easy, but I have come to understand that self-reflective talk between teachers is a useful place to start. Of course, being self-reflective about teaching, and especially about the emotionality of teaching, can itself be painful and exhausting. As Robert Yagelski has recently written, "It is one thing to assert that critical teaching can and even should be uncomfortable, but how do we understand and confront this discomfort, this doubt, in our individual efforts to engage in a reflective practice when we know that a sense of confidence is also crucial to effective teaching" (35). Not only is doubt about one's teaching difficult to confront, but so is all emotion in relation to teaching. Reflecting on teaching, however, means acknowledging that emotion is inseparable from our lives as teachers and from our relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. Turning away from emotion, as I did in my initial response to Judy, is not only unhelpful, but potentially harmful.

So what are the "solutions" to the question of how to "practice being vulnerable" without becoming damaged and of what can we as teachers and mentors of teachers do to help teachers negotiate this situation? As teachers and teachers of teachers we need to begin to open up a dialogue about it, as Yagelski has done with the idea of doubt. To open and sustain such dialogue, we need to practice what Krista Ratcliffe calls rhetorical listening, "consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others, while consciously acknowledging all our particular and fluid standpoints" (205). Such a practice involves "listening to discourse not *for* intent but *with* intent" (205). Rhetorical listening is an act of invention that leads to response within a relationship of mutuality, rather than to the kind of pat teacherly advice that I first gave Judy. Such listening involves empathy, an important strand of what Goleman calls "emotional intelligence." Through such listening, we can begin to engage in "the ongoing process of entertaining alternatives. For it is through such revision that change becomes imaginable, escape from the lonely, isolated world of the merely personal becomes possible, and the redemptive power of theory becomes tangible" (Miller 285). Al-

though I object to Richard E. Miller's bifurcation of the personal and the public, I do see that such a search for alternatives through dialogue between teachers has to be the basis for change. Through sustained dialogue, we can begin to revise the institutional discourses that construct outlaw emotions and instead use emotion as a starting point from which to critique the material circumstances of both teachers at particular institutions and teachers as a whole. Emotion then becomes a way to move, to create change rather than an unacceptable expression of the "merely personal." In this way, we can help to revise the discursive formations that have a very real effect on the lives of teachers like Judy.

The dialogue between Judy and me didn't end after that first journal, but has continued, though in more limited ways, even through my move to another job. In fact, Judy read and responded to an earlier version of this paper before I presented it at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. In her email she wrote:

I thought the article was great! I thought you explained the difficulty with developing a balance well. I am interested to know what your colleagues think.

It is fine with me if you use my first name. There is no need to change anything—you portrayed our dialogue well. But there is one thing I wanted to let you know—I was not angry. I wrote the shoot your eye out thing not out of anger but out of desperation. Everyone was telling me I'd burn out, and I turned to you b/c I thought you'd understand and help me, but then you told me the same thing everyone else did. I wasn't angry, just desperate to talk about it with someone who I thought could relate.

Also, as a postscript, I still get frustrated and worn out on my job, but I am doing better now that grad school is over. I have my evenings and weekends to do what I want to do and to forget about work. Moving to Greenville has helped—being away from the town that I associate w/work. You are right that your listening helped the most, but your advice did too. I make a conscious effort now to include other things in my life, to make time for myself, and that has really helped.

Thanks for sharing this with me, and good luck at your presentation!

Listening to her in this note helps me to once again re-frame what happened through an act of interpretive invention. What I had interpreted as Judy's anger was instead desperation, a plea for someone to take her emotions seriously. I know now that I did not do so, and that, even in my later responses, I was unable to engage her as productively as I should have. In seeing Judy's second note as angry, I had envisioned a greater degree of agency for Judy than she actually felt. At that point, she was past anger and, at desperation, was closer to burnout than either of us has ever admitted to one another. In looking back, I realize that I was equally desperate, though my desperation involved trying to avoid painful emo-

tions that I did not want to acknowledge, either in myself or in Judy. By talking candidly about our emotions, however, we can make an effort to sustain our dialogue about teaching, exploring alternatives and revising the scripts available to teachers.

I received one more email message from Judy as I was doing the revisions for this piece. The editors had asked if I could include more information about Judy's side of the story, and so I sent Judy an email in which I asked if there was anything else she wanted to add. She replied:

My husband and I are really enjoying living in Greenville. We've met lots of people and there's lots more fun stuff to do than in the tiny town of Tarboro.

I also think it's helped me to be away from work (by living in Greenville but still working in Tarboro), speaking of burnout. Tarboro is so small that everywhere I went I'd run into people from work—students or co-workers. I lived so close to work that I'd go in on weekends to get things done. Now when I leave work, I don't think about it as much. It is truly "down" time, and that helps. I do not bring home work on weeknights at all, and bring only about 2-3 hours worth on weekends. So I really am doing a much better job of leaving work at work.

Not being in grad school anymore has also helped tremendously. Since I was getting a degree in something related to my work, I thought about work at work and at home while doing take home work and school work ALL THE TIME. Now that I'm not in grad school, when I'm home I have time for me, time for friends, time for a social life. That has helped tremendously.

I have not taught since Spring 98, the semester that I taught 10 hours along with being tutor program coordinator and retention specialist. I told them I could not teach and do the job they hired me to do. I could do one or the other. Since I was initially hired as retention specialist, they made that a full-time position. It is still busy, as I work with all 14-1500 curriculum students, day and night, on our two campuses (you can see why teaching, especially the self-consuming way that I teach, was enough to push me over the edge on top of all this.) I still put my all into my work, but am learning where to draw lines so as to not get so involved that I wear myself out. I still worry about burn out, and I think my enthusiasm for my job has waned since I started. I can actually feel the apathy slowly growing in me sometimes when I'm feeling especially drained, but I try to keep that in check because I don't want to not care, but I also don't want to care so much that my frustrations drive me bonkers.

In reading this note, I see that Judy envisioned two alternative positions for herself within the available discourses, to continue to teach in the manner she

knew or to get out of teaching. She clearly chose the latter. Could I have done anything to help her imagine other alternatives, to act in alliance with her to revise the discourse surrounding teaching and therefore her circumstances and position as teacher? It is, of course, impossible to say, but I do know that the experience has pushed me to think through these issues for myself as a teacher, but more importantly, for myself as someone who works on a daily basis with teaching assistants and has frequent contact with K-12 teachers.

Of Judy's experience of the situation, I have only these textual traces and my memories of what she said and did during that semester. Looking at this final note, I realize that she made the decision that she needed to make; that note represents the continuation of her story. This article represents the continuation of my story as I attempt to revise the discourses available to me and others in my position for the next time I come in contact with a teacher on the edge of burn-out. ☹

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# Discredited Metaphors of Mind Limit Our Vision

Marilyn Middendorf

**O**f all teachers, teachers of writing probably have the surest insight, the closest look into the minds of their students. Most of us appreciate and try to nurture the tangled process of developing meaning out of private universes. We glimpse the unruly, outwardly chaotic jumble of our students' thoughts. We deploy diverse strategies to help our students create order, acceptable logic, appropriate voices. More than most teachers, writing teachers see the shifting, chaotic process that eventually results in "the final paper." But what happens in students' minds as they battle to "take charge" of their communications? Do we have a clue? We are certainly proud of our training, yet lately I've recognized a basic element missing in that training.

When we successfully initiate students into our current model of communication—"sender-receiver, information transfer"—we reinforce our culture's central metaphor of mind. In this essay, I want to explore the possibility that our dominant model of communication is unrealistic primarily because it is derived from a misleading metaphor of mind. Our image of our mind limits us as we approach our students and attempt to shape their communication.

Without doubt, our mental imagery controls much of what we do. When we are dealing with students' thinking, what metaphor of consciousness are we harboring? What are our cultural assumptions about consciousness? Do we, as teachers, have different assumptions from our surrounding culture? Do we have a clearer image of consciousness? After all, our business is shaping and sharpening our students' minds. What do we suppose happens in consciousness when a thought is "translated" into writing, into meaning? The cartoon image shows a light bulb shining brightly. Another common image is wheels turning. Is our understanding of consciousness no more sophisticated than this? Our central metaphor of mind is so seldom discussed in our culture or our profession that it is nearly invisible. Yet this ghostly image dictates much of what we do.

I asked several of my colleagues and students to describe their images of their own consciousness. They did better than light bulbs and wheels. After casual, open discussion, they suggested abstracted beings, like the Ghost in the Machine; the Grand Interpreter; the Central Meaner; the Homunculus (the little man who sits inside reviewing everything); I, the Decision Maker; and I, the Dictator. One suggested a disembodied Seat of Consciousness. A number (mainly students) pictured their individual consciousness as a computer, only a really big one, "like we'll have in the future." All of these images of consciousness share a

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common thread: a mysterious Someone or Something is assumed to be “in control.” In the Western world, the debate over the centuries among philosophers has been about what is IN THERE producing thoughts? Thus far, the debate has always assumed a “top down” approach. Some ill-defined “central controller” is in charge of the mental process.

Nearly all our “top down” metaphors for consciousness are similar because of our Western tradition and the historical importance of Cartesian dualism. The pressure of history makes it difficult for us to *even imagine* any reality other than dualism. Dualism is taken for granted. We embrace the mind/body split, in part, because our culture reinforces this image at nearly every turn: the spirit soars and the flesh plods along, the spirit is created by God while the flesh is made from clay, mind over matter, from dust to dust while the spirit lives on. In step with our culture, we educators harbor this metaphor of human consciousness which, it turns out, might be misleading. Our collective metaphors, mostly unexamined, may be limiting the richness of our inner lives and inhibiting our understanding of the mystery of consciousness. Recent discoveries in the “brain sciences” posit a new metaphor for consciousness, one quite contrary to our standard assumptions. Moreover, these recent discoveries in the “brain sciences” erode the mind/body hierarchy of dualism. Even worse, they ask us to accept materialism as a scientific certainty. Our wonderful minds are composed solely of physical matter.

Although we reap the vast benefits of all that science has wrought, our culture seems to coexist grudgingly and reluctantly with the “truths” posited by science. We benefit from and appreciate (not uncritically) the intellectual leadership of the scientific establishment. Scientists function almost as “priests” did before the age of science; they reveal secrets of the physical universe which only they can “see.” Typically, these scientists do not ask the general public to understand “too much” about their discoveries. Our culture and these “priests” dwell in different belief systems, almost parallel universes. One of the bedrock assumptions of the “scientific world view” discredits dualism. The hierarchical mind/body split of dualism is regarded as quaint, hopelessly naive. Although fundamentally anti-dualist, John Searle is kinder than many of his colleagues exploring matters of the brain:

The separation between mind and matter was a useful heuristic tool in the seventeenth century, a tool that facilitated a great deal of progress that took place in the sciences. However, the separation is philosophically confused, and by the twentieth century it had become a massive obstacle to a scientific understanding of the place of consciousness within the natural world. (85)

Searle claims that our culture is “historically conditioned to think” (14) in the vocabulary of dualism and that prevents even “good thinkers” from comprehending their “inner reality.” He further asserts that dualism is totally discredited by anyone with “even a modicum of ‘scientific’ education” (91). What percentage of citizens have at least this much understanding of scientific basics? I would hope that the number is large, but I fear it is not. An editorialist in *The New Yorker*, pondering the immense power of sheer belief which led to the mass

suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult, concludes that "[T]hough science is stronger today than when Galileo knelt before the Inquisition, it remains a minority habit of mind, and its future is very much in doubt" (Ferris 31). Our culture seems mired in ancient belief systems which the scientific world has abandoned. Dualism is the unrealistic yet dominant belief system of our 21st century culture where the scientific world view remains a "minority habit of mind."

Questioning dualism is difficult. Our Western culture has created a masterful image of human glory and our special relationship to the material world. Michelangelo's image of God, the Father, touching life into Adam infuses our lives with meaning and purpose. Our mental imagery is stuck in a pre-industrial, pre-Darwinian world. For most, this world of images goes unexamined. One who does explore this usually uncharted territory is David Denby. In retracing Darwin's journey, Denby expresses our general reluctance to look into the face of scientific "reality" because it affects us personally: "That human beings had descended from the apes was no longer difficult to accept. But the notion that human existence is a mere accident—that the glittering jewel, consciousness, is just another adaptive mechanism—was a vile blow to one's self-esteem" (59). Many of us deny the "scientific reality" of materialism for so many powerful historical, religious, and personal reasons that the subject is nearly taboo. But it is a given in scientific circles.

If we educators approach the new theories of consciousness with "eyes" that can see, we need to first distance ourselves from the usual dualistic assumptions we make about ourselves and our students. We must be skeptical of our unexamined metaphors and explore how they might distort the way we picture our "inner workings." These new theories of consciousness offer "new ways of thinking," new metaphors of consciousness to replace the old.

The "brain sciences" themselves have only begun to tackle the mystery of consciousness. For the first 90 years of the 20th century, these scientists did not delve into the subject of consciousness. Now, the many scientific disciplines honing in on the question of consciousness have collectively agreed on a few fundamentals. They agree that the problem of consciousness—although the most mysterious of all mysteries tackled by the scientific method—will be solved. This conviction itself is a radical departure from the conventional wisdom of a decade ago. One of the leading theorists, Daniel Dennett ponders the difficulty of imagining how the mind can emanate from the material brain, and concludes that "you really have to know quite a lot of what science has discovered about how brains work, but much more important, you have to learn new ways of thinking" (*Consciousness* 16). After only two decades of laboratory experimentation on how the brain works, the advances coming from neuroscience in particular will help us "connect what we know about our minds to what we know (scientifically) about our brains" (Edelman 4). These scientists hope that this new information will help our culture cast off the historical blinders that keep us from understanding our inner workings. This new information about our brains (which I sketchily review here) may facilitate "new ways of thinking."

Dennett claims that dualism leaves us with "bad grammar" that compels us to buy into the Cartesian world view even if we know it is discredited. We see ourselves as "witnessing" our inner workings; however, Dennet claims that "events



that happen in your brain, just like events that happen in your stomach or your liver, are not normally witnessed by anyone” (*Consciousness* 29). We tend to imagine a “self” sitting inside our head, processing the proceedings. This picture distorts the reality that science has now documented. No “I” is in charge. Only our material gray matter creates all our mind stuff. Our mental life is a purely physical process, and this process is out of our hands.

So what metaphors for mind are consistent with the new data? Dennett proposes new vocabulary for a new model: Multiple Drafts from the Pandemonium Theater. This metaphor pushes our understanding of mind closer to the chaotic stream of life being lived. If there is no center, if no “I” is in charge of consciousness, what goes on during thought? Dennett’s Multiple Drafts model posits that perceptions and all mental activities are subjected to “continuous ‘editorial revision’” (*Consciousness* 111). He describes thinking as follows:

These editorial processes occur over large fractions of a second, during which time various additions, incorporations [. . .] and overwritings of content can occur, in various orders. We don’t directly experience what happens on our retinas, in our ears, on the surface of our skin. What we actually experience is a product of many processes of interpretation—editorial processes, in effect. They take in relatively raw and one-sided representations, and they take place in the streams of activity in various parts of the brain. This much is recognized by virtually all theories of perception, but now we are poised for the novel feature of the Multiple Drafts model: Feature detections or discriminations *only have to be made once*. That is, once a particular “observation” of some feature has been made, by a specialized, localized portion of the brain, the information content thus fixed does not have to be sent somewhere else to be rediscriminated by some “master” discriminator. (112–13)

Our brain’s physical processing “editorializes” our existence for us. The brain as a biological organ simply “stores” the interpretations it makes, incorporating the new input with all the other bits of previously interpreted information (*Consciousness* 127). The information stream is turbulent and wild, bursting its banks, creating new channels, meandering at random. However, when one of these drafts is “published” through utterance, when a thought finds language, our common sense (and dualism) tells us that some One was in control of that utterance. We assume a Central Meaner from the Cartesian Theater issued a statement, proving “I” was in charge of my mental processes. Dennett argues that the complex physical processes of our brain *can only* render drafts upon drafts from the Pandemonium Theater. The Central Meaner—the “I”—changes any time and every time the stream is dipped into. This “flow” is how we think! The stream of consciousness—electrical and chemical impulses—flows out of our control. He describes our mental process as highly chaotic, totally unique to the moment and not duplicative. If this picture is our mental reality (as these scientists posit), no wonder we grasp for any sense of order.

We assume a Self—an “I”—is in charge, but Dennett exposes this sense of Self as a fiction. He argues that our material brain cells create “us” and take “us”

along on a magnificent ride. According to this Multiple Drafts metaphor, our consciousness is a flowing, evolving collection of narratives. The words straining to “translate” our inner thoughts are highly revised narratives “from deep inside the system” (*Consciousness* 238). Thus, we negotiate with our external environments through these narratives. According to Dennett, words are as integral to humans as webs are to spiders and dams are to beavers: “Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others—and ourselves—about who we are” (418). These sustaining narratives come forth naturally, effortlessly and seem *as if* from a single source. The illusion is natural, but Dennett warns us that “our tales are spun, but for the most part we don’t spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source” (*Consciousness* 418). No One controls the mental processes, and no Self concocts the narratives told; the physical process produces the One, the Self, the delusion of a Central Meaner. Dennett admits that his Multiple Drafts model is his beginning attempt to forge “new ways of thinking” about our inner reality.

Once we understand the massive complexity of our consciousness, as explained by the “brain sciences,” materialism becomes easier to accept. To be only made of matter loses its demeaning connotation, its deflating aspect, when we begin to understand the degree of complexity that matter is capable of achieving. That is what the recent discoveries of the “brain sciences” are forcing our culture to confront. I, for one, thank them. Reading these theorists has given me new insight—new mental imagery and understanding—about my own inner world. I feel released from false expectations and more deeply appreciative of my turbulence and density, of both my dreaming and wakeful consciousness. Dennett confesses to the usual human foible: “We would like to think of ourselves as godlike creators of ideas, manipulating and controlling them as our whim dictates, and judging them from an independent, Olympian standpoint. But even if this is our ideal, we know that it is seldom if ever our reality” (*Darwin* 346). For Dennett, Pandemonium prevails in our brains, and “we” are created—“spun”—by its elaborate physical processes.

Another leading theorist pictures an even more contrarian model of mind. Working from the same scientific discoveries about the brain’s structure, composition, organization, and evolution, Gerald Edelman claims that neuroscience is “on the threshold of knowing how we know” (xiii). His biologically-based theory of consciousness accomplishes two goals: to explain our consciousness as we “know” it to be (both personally and scientifically) and to explore our place as a species of life created through natural selection. His model of mind exalts the “how” and demotes the “what.” Nothing is magic about “what” composes the nervous system. Our three pounds of gray matter is made of ordinary cells, called neurons. For Edelman, the magic is “how” these simple cells are able to connect to one another. Our neuronal networks are capable of “massive connectivity” which makes the human brain not only “the most complicated material object in the known universe” but also “something unique in the universe” (17). Even though this hyperdense connectivity is difficult for most of us to imagine, Edelman argues that we experience it within our own consciousness all the time. Edelman

helps us visualize the “massiveness” of our brain material by explaining that it would take 32 million years to count the synapses (connections) if we counted them one per second (17). Furthermore, none of these massive connections is “hardwired.” These individual connections *organize themselves* into neuronal groups, which in turn form “maps” or networks of “maps” for sensations and thoughts to travel. These “maps” form connections to other “maps” and networks of “maps.” These, in turn, collide, merge, diverge, fragment, overlap, strike out to new “maps.” Neuronal “maps,” working together, create brain activity on their own. One word, say “sailboat,” lights up “maps” everywhere throughout the brain; with the second mention, the “mapping” is similar but not identical, as new connections to other networks are made, hence strengthening some while neglecting others. The path the “map” creates is never the same. Common sense tells us that our brains are primarily concerned with registering sensory data from the outside, but neuroscience has proven the opposite to be true. The brain is “more in touch with itself than with anything else” (19). The brain’s connectivity is ceaseless. We experience this faintly during dreaming, the brain coursing through its circuits without conscious “control.” This startling fact suggests that our biology makes us self-absorbed, almost “locked in” by our own circuitry. Our uniquely complex brains generate our minds. The connective texture spins so richly, so immensely, so turbulently that a consciousness arises from the material circuitry. No thing or no one is in control. The material process of “mapping” creates the individual.

Edelman pictures consciousness arising from a massive material system of such complexity that it is difficult to comprehend. This material system is elaborately and complexly “mapped” and “running on its own” energy and under its own innate guidance. Each brain organizes itself by itself. While the anatomy of the brain makes human brains seem alike, no two brains—not even those of identical twins with hypothetical identical life experiences—can be alike. The neuronal groups of each brain and the “mapping choices” are totally unique to an individual organism—during embryonic development as well as during life. Thus, the brain’s organization is interactive, self-monitoring, recursive, continual, and original to that individual brain, in all phases of life. Through electrical/chemical mechanisms, neuronal groups create sprawling, overlapping “maps” which are so dense, shifting, and variable that the “paths” are not actually laid down or hard-wired. These “paths” are not identifiable, reversible, or even repeatable (for each “path” taken alters the path itself). Edelman claims that we do not “store” the idea of “sailboat” anywhere, as most of us imagine. Instead, the word lights certain networks of “maps” but not always the same ones; the word fires differently at different times and always will. This idea is similar to Dennett’s concept of the mental stream being dipped into at random. The physical process drives the activity. The “mapping” operates beyond an individual’s control. In a sense, the “mapping choices” generate the individual.

I have greatly compressed his elaborate arguments and illustrations to give a taste of the enormous complexity that neuroscience has uncovered about our great mystery, our consciousness. While the individual disciplines of the “brain sciences” argue ferociously, there are core agreements about a scientific way to understand ourselves. Is this picture of our material minds being out of our con-

trol distressing? I think not. Dennett creates a charming metaphor of mind to alleviate any hint of distress. Edelman admits no distress whatsoever. Indeed, he seems to be in awe of (and inspires awe about) our magnificent, uniquely complex, material nervous system that produces human consciousness.

Edelman explores how such a complex system as consciousness arose—a product of the process of natural selection. For Dennett, we are totally adrift, floating on a deep well of “editorializations” with no control. For Edelman, the “mapping choices” our immensely connected brain makes are out of *our* control, but—here’s the kicker—these choices are based on value for the individual organism and the species. Thus, the process of consciousness is not haphazard (as in Dennett’s metaphor) but based on value, and hence, advancement and progress. Edelman takes a “bottom-up” look at our human consciousness and our place in the natural realm. He urges us to discard all our normal metaphors for ourselves because they distort the richness (and reality) of our mental lives. With his theory of consciousness, he intends to reunite the spiritual and corporeal, the mind and the body, and put the human mind back into nature—from which it emerged during the process of natural selection. His central metaphor for mind is jungle: “the chemical and electrical dynamics of the brain resemble [nothing so much as] the sound and light patterns and the movement and growth patterns of a jungle” (29). For Edelman, the most apt and realistic metaphor for our brains, the individual consciousness that arises from them, is that they were as intricate, delicate and adaptive as a thriving jungle. The ecological efficiency of an evolving jungle is densely interconnective and creative. It grows as it lives. The jungle has no hierarchy, but it has dense, shifting patterns. These patterns are created—perhaps even controlled—by the process of natural selection. (Natural selection as a process producing diverse “products” is more sophisticated than our culture’s grasp of it as only survival of the fittest; rather, the process “selects” based on value for the individual organism, the species, and the cooperating environment.) As natural selection keeps the jungle healthy through a selection process based on value, so do the “mapping choices” of our functioning brains. The brain has evolved as a product of natural selection, and it mimics the selection system which gave it birth. The brain spins forth a consciousness so powerful that it can contemplate the laws of nature of which it is a part. We can ask “why” and answer “why not.” We can construct myths to explain the mysteries of our observed universe. We can spiritualize our vast material systems. But we cannot leave the system that spawned us, for we are that system, product and process. Both Edelman and Dennett conclude their books by reiterating that their individual theories are only the beginning in the search for this particular truth about the material world, truth about consciousness. They openly invite challenges from other disciplines probing the brain. Nothing is set in stone except certain foundational assumptions. Consciousness is a material process, vastly and densely complex, operating beyond our control but creating “us” as on-going works in progress, as individuals and as a species.

All educators, especially composition teachers, should be aware of these recent findings of the “brain sciences.” They certainly challenge the foundational image of consciousness dominant in our culture. Based on scientific data, these new findings claim that consciousness is not a miracle product, located some-

where magical, but a chaotically complex material process, totally de-centered, indeterminate, self-organizing, and creative. I am, you are, and they are. We are; therefore, we think. And it's a jungle in there.

What can composition teachers learn from these changed metaphors of how consciousness works? I have already altered my perceptions, my pictures, of my mind at work and of my students' minds at work. I have gained more respect for the complexity of the writing and communication tasks we require of our students. So far, this appreciation is too abstract to turn into lesson plans, but it has altered my pedagogy in profound ways. My foundational metaphors have changed, and these changes percolate up. It's "a bottom-up" process, like consciousness.

Another "bottom up" process is taking place in the field of composition studies, I hope. This new information about consciousness—the changed metaphors of mind—will enhance this effort. A number of composition theorists have challenged our discipline's foundational images, the communication model. Typically, disciplines are slow to reach their foundational issues. It took the "brain sciences" ninety years to even consider their fundamental issue—consciousness. Our discipline has benefited from heated debates on many important issues, but about our foundational thinking (the communication model) there has been mostly silence. Until recently, that is. At least four composition theorists are questioning our current theory of language. Each describes the limitations imposed by the "information transfer" model of language and calls for a better, more realistic model. All four attack our assumptions about the dominant communication model. James Thomas Zebroski is direct in his assault:

I want to argue that this "communication model" of language is simplistic and inadequate, and that it is, nonetheless, pervasive in the composition discipline and the research issuing forth. Until the pervasiveness and inadequacy of this theory of language is recognized and transcended, much of the new research in writing, as interesting as it may otherwise be, will tell us what in some sense we already know. To see writing activity in a truly new way, to find more successful ways of teaching composition, we need to reconceptualize our entire theory of language. (179)

He goes on to dissect the unreality of the "sender-receiver, encoding-decoding model" (181) and the communication triangle upon which Western theories of language are based. He argues forcefully that our discipline ought to adopt a dialogic theory of language.

In a similar vein, Ann M. Penrose and Cheryl Geisler explore the limitations which the "traditional information-transfer model" (507) imposes on our students. They find that the model with which "students enter college classrooms" has a "direct influence on reading and writing processes" (515). They argue that our students are so limited by the model most prevalent in our institutions that "an alternative to the information-transfer model [should] insist on more interactive models of education in which a genuine rhetorical perspective is not only taught but enacted" (517). They promise that the classroom and all within its walls will change for the better when we adopt a more realistic model of communication.

Another assault on our dominant model of communication comes from Irene

Ward: “many compositionists are abandoning the notion that written communication is a one-way process in which a reader decodes a message sent by a writer via the conduit of language” (2). She traces the history of these “departures” from the standard model (by some of our best known theorists) in great detail. She examines the twists and turns that our discipline took as it matured into a discipline. Although the dominant model of communication has been questioned along the way, it remains firmly implanted and largely unchallenged. She then calls for a new model to replace our current “process model,” which is flawed because it is based on an unrealistic picture of communication. She wants to replace it with the theory of communication called Functional Dialogism. She argues “that dialogism is fundamental to the modern composition pedagogy” (203) but that we generally do not acknowledge it.

That these teachers are calling for a thorough examination of our foundational assumptions about language is roughly parallel to the movement in the “brain sciences.” Both disciplines require a model which is consistent with the base reality. When the controlling image—the foundational metaphor—is out of synch with the reality it attempts to illustrate, progress within that field is severely limited. We continue to train our students in a questionable model of communication—“information transfer”—for a number of reasons (reluctance to change probably being the most significant). Perhaps we are also limited by our current “top-down” image of how minds work. Although we’ve glimpsed into the unruly, chaotic stream of our students’ largely untrained minds, we do not understand what we see. We try to fix the mess. If our profession had “new ways of thinking” about that tumult—a new metaphor of consciousness—we might do a better job of “milking” that reality.

In this essay, I have outlined the scientific argument against the old model of mind—the dualistic, hierarchical Self. Perhaps, if we in the field of writing learn more about how minds work, we can use this knowledge to replace our current model of communication with a model more reflective of real communication. I am partial to the dialogic models of communication suggested by Zebroski, Penrose and Geisler, and Ward. After reading Bakhtin over a decade ago, I started using dialogic methods in my writing pedagogy and became a convert. I see deep correspondences between a dialogic model of communication and the new model of mind. These correspondences are abstract but crucial. Both foundational models displace the centeredness of the self. The unitariness or wholeness or completedness of the usual idea of Self is replaced by a sense of self which is (in reality) incomplete, still-forming, still-responsive, always interactive; the flow of the dialogic self is—in communication and in biology—a process of discovery, uncertainty, and creativity. False certainty is dissipated by uncertainty. As I suggested in the beginning, teachers of writing sense the accuracy of the new metaphors of mind. We see our students living in “the jungle” or attending the Pandemonium Theater. Many of us help them out of confusion by assigning the five-paragraph essay, the Process Analysis, or Classification essay, all with an outline. A dialogic model of communication would benefit our students immensely: students would not learn to fear confusion but would learn to use it. They could shed their certainty and explore uncertainty. They might think better if they were released from the requirement of linear thinking. But most

important, they might grow more reflective under a dialogic model of communication. The old but dominant metaphor of mind sanctions the old, but dominant models for communication. If you change one, you can change the other.

I see profound correspondences between these calls for a more realistic communication model and for new foundational images of consciousness. The old models are regarded not only as misleading but also as limiting. Admittedly, I have greatly oversimplified these new theories of consciousness and reduced the science to what a humanist understands; I hope to intrigue my colleagues into reading within these other disciplines. Clearly, the mind is our business, too. We should be aware of the scientific changes eventually, ultimately coming our way. While the debates among these “brain scientists” are heated, a consensus—a new image of consciousness—has emerged. Once we have “new ways of thinking” about our inner lives and understand the immense complexity of our material system, we might reconnect to the spiritual. Material systems as complex as our brains can produce amazing “spiritual” stuff. At the very least, “new ways of thinking” will encourage a non-hierarchical approach to our material stuff, our brains. We can appreciate and learn from the shifting pictures being floated out of the scientific disciplines. New and better metaphors for mind are out there. Perhaps more realistic pictures will help us unleash the depths and density we fear many of our students do not have.

Don't fear going into the jungle. ☺

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# Flow, Centering, and the Classroom: Wisdom from an Ancient Friend\*

Lorie Heggie

*Your horse is your mirror. Learn what your  
horse has to teach you and then apply it to  
something else in your life.*

—An Old Arab Proverb

One-two-three, one-two-three. I am cantering. No, *we* are cantering. We are moving rhythmically forward in this three-beat gait with a suspended fourth beat, and I am so relaxed that it feels as if my own legs are doing the cantering, not my horse's. I feel centered with my horse as she carries me willingly; I am sitting tall, square, supple, yet strong enough to balance with 1,000 pounds of momentum underneath me. I live for such spiritual moments; we are *in flow*.

To be centered in the physical sense is to be balanced, relaxed, strong, aware. A rider must keep her center on a horse both physically and spiritually if she hopes to achieve quality in dressage requirements such as shoulder-in or half-pass, movements where the horse moves laterally and forward with much force. Dressage is the ultimate form of classical riding where the rider and horse “dance” together as one with very little obvious communication. It only takes seeing the Lippizaner stallions perform or watching the dressage events in the Olympics to understand the seamless, precise, gentle, but extravagant energy that characterizes the dressage pair.

If a horse is naturally balanced, achieving this ideal is somewhat easier, which is why certain breeds are preferred. My horse, however, was very unbalanced, stiff in some ways, supple in others. Until I learned to find my own balance, my own center, I could not help her find hers. And so began my quest. Through the years, I have learned first the physical balance required to find my center and then the spiritual balance that allows me to keep my center while using different parts of my body independently. This process required learning first cognitively, and eventually somatically, the physical and mental strategies that would allow me to be centered, relaxed, and confident. My experience as a teacher

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\* This paper is dedicated with love to my horse, *Sanderia Fawnnya*, who has guided me to new levels of consciousness, and I am forever in her debt. I would also like to thank Maureen White and DeeDee Rea, the trainers who have taught me well.



formed a foundation for how to train both my horse and myself. Unexpectedly, this process influenced my teaching.

What would it take to have a centered classroom? Kristie S. Fleckenstein argues that classrooms have become de-centered as a result of our need to quantify; we tend to honor the material over the spiritual, the rational over the intuitive, the social over the self, and critical thinking is valued without questioning why ("Creating" 25). As she observes, centering a class does not mean a "teacher-centered" or "student-centered" classroom, but rather, a classroom where affect is recognized and integrated with cognition. Meaning is then created through a dialectic process where a renewed emphasis on the self leads to more relevant learning. Teacher and student work together, neither fragmented nor unified, but centered within the participatory consciousness of the mind-body connection (26). The construction of this type of classroom reveals itself only slowly to our minds as it is very different from current prototypes for classroom interaction. How do we create a "center that holds" (25)?

For me, these concepts find a home in the somatic experience of riding and training a horse. The horse context adds an important dimension to the meaning of connecting the mind and the body. With the horse, a rider must not only build a consciousness through cognitive understanding and felt sense of her own body, but must also influence, understand, and merge with another consciousness, that of the horse. This connection creates a reciprocity of communication. Good riding is not based on a master-servant relationship with the horse; good riding is not based on domination and submission. Instead, good riding is the result of a partnership of two beings working together, respecting each other. With this understanding, the rider-horse relationship mirrors the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. I have experienced the same feeling of sublime centeredness on my horse and in the classroom. In both contexts I have felt the energy connection where a soft, vibrating oneness creates an incredible inner stillness, much more akin to silence than to noise (Suhor). I cannot help but think that something from my riding is transferring to how I manage the classroom energy. This paper is an attempt to explore those principles of riding that help me to work with students in a way that fleshes out my personal metaphor for participatory consciousness in a way that may help teachers and students.

To provide a framework, I will use the concept of flow as a way to understand the process of centering and transcendence. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (4). They are completely absorbed in the activity and "typically feel strong, alert, in effortless control, unselfconscious, and at the peak of their abilities" (4). In fact, flow may be achieved in many different types of activities, from rock climbing to experiencing a raindrop glistening on a leaf. What riding a horse and teaching a class have in common is that these activities both involve interacting with energies that are larger than the self. In each case, an individual is attempting to guide and motivate the energy of another to reach certain goals. The insights provided by horse riding derive from the fact that, because of the immediacy and very explicit reactions of horses, riders are left with far less ambiguity in their minds as to the effectiveness of their actions than teachers experience in the classroom. Because horses cannot separate their mind

and body the way humans can, their reactions, both good and bad, always contain an important message for the rider if the rider is able to listen. Good riding teaches good listening. Good listening is essential to good teaching because students are far more complex than horses, providing far more complexity in their responses. Moreover, students come in groups and therefore create situations of multiple energy.

Nevertheless, dressage can support the development of a spiritual center by revealing to us some of the hidden ordering principles that drive the conversation between an individual and others (Berger, *etd.* in Fleckenstein "Creating" 26). In order to make sense of these principles, I will first explore the concept of flow as developed by Csikszentmihalyi. Understanding how flow is achieved in general terms will allow us to see how the five guidelines extracted from dressage training help the teacher and students to attain flow.

### The Definition of Flow

Research on the psychology of "optimal experience," or flow, attempts to analyze and categorize the types of experiences that create happiness. Researchers have studied the experiences of factory workers, Japanese motorcycle gangs, students, sailors, and elderly Koreans, among others, through various methods of self-report, interviewing, and a methodology explicitly devised for this context called the Experience Sampling Method (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi). This is a process where participants are paged a number of times each day over a certain period of time and asked to report on their current setting, emotional state, and activities. Through these studies, the researchers found that a state of flow requires just the right balance of challenge. A person must be neither too anxious nor too bored. Moreover, a person must be interested in the activity, or apathy results (261).

For most people, finding themselves in a state of flow is a pleasant reward for pursuing an interesting challenge. We know that when we immerse ourselves in certain activities, we may tend to lose our self-consciousness, and time just disappears: we enjoy ourselves. However, as Csikszentmihalyi suggests, it may be possible to make conscious choices that will enhance the opportunities for flow. He refers to this trait as the "autotelic self" and gives guidelines for strengthening this dynamic within the individual. Csikszentmihalyi defines "autotelic" as "self-goals" to capture the idea that the individual who is able to achieve flow is also able to transform potentially deadening experiences into flow through the application of self-contained goals (209).

Accordingly, the first of four rules for developing an autotelic self is to set goals. One must have clear goals in order to know which choices to make. Moreover, because of these clear goals, feedback as to whether one is achieving one's goals is clear as well. This immediate feedback allows the autotelic self to build in the chosen direction, allowing a person to be both more consistent and more flexible. In having chosen the goal that she is pursuing, the autotelic person has not only a sense of ownership of her decisions, but also the capacity for changing these decisions if the rationale no longer exists for continuing them (Csikszentmihalyi 210). Thus, the first step towards flow is to know one's goals and not lose sight of them.

My own experience with horses would suggest that this “eye on the goal” is not a hard, focused stare, but rather a softer awareness that encompasses the larger context as well. That is, we are mindful of the goal without letting it dominate our field of vision. Sally Swift calls this attitude “soft eyes,” a concept that is discussed in the context of jumping horses. The goal is to jump over a fence, an action that many horses enjoy and will do on their own. However, successful jumping is more difficult than it looks. Many problems at fences are attributable to rider error; the rider is thinking too much about the fence and transmits this harder inner stare to the horse, who then thinks the fence might be something scary.

So what allows a person to maintain a soft connection to her goals? A rider must be confident and believe in herself, that she is strong enough to stay with the horse. This observation would suggest that setting goals requires a prerequisite belief by the individual that she has the means to attain these goals. This belief in oneself must be separate from whether an activity is actually feasible or not. It is not uncommon to see riders do less and less for a while after some traumatic event such as a fall; fear will hold a rider back, despite the physical ability to do many different things.

The second rule for achieving flow is to become immersed in the activity, to invest in the activity at hand. However, if one is to lose oneself in an activity, two factors must be present. The first is that the activity chosen needs to be neither too easy nor too difficult; it must be at an appropriate level for the skills of the individual. If the activity is too hard, the person will feel overwhelmed and anxious. If the activity is too easy, the person will feel bored. In either case, flow will not be reached. This understanding merges with the notion of confidence developed earlier, making clear that “difficulty” can be defined not only in terms of the physical activity itself, but also in terms of emotional challenge, or affect. In order to reach flow, a person needs to be comfortable and confident in both mind and body.

Becoming immersed in an activity requires concentration (Csikszentmihalyi 211). If an individual is easily distracted by outside influences for whatever reason, her ability to achieve flow will be compromised. Most certainly, horses can be all consuming. People invest in activities for which they feel a passion; it is the love for our passion that conquers fear and boredom and anxiety.

The third rule for flow is to pay attention to or to focus on what is happening. Without focus, athletes cannot maintain their effort (Csikszentmihalyi 212). The key to focus is the absence of self-consciousness. Individuals must be so involved in the activity that worries about how they look from the outside disappear. It thus takes the desire and ability to merge with the “here and now” to achieve flow. This aspect of flow touches on the Zen concept of living in the fullness of the moment (Suhor). As Csikszentmihalyi points out, this merging with an activity leads to a paradoxical result because the individual, in becoming one with the activity and no longer feeling like an individual, actually becomes stronger: “The autotelic individual grows beyond the limits of individuality by investing psychic energy in a system in which she is included. Because of the union of the person and the system, the self emerges at a higher level of complexity” (212).

Accordingly, the person who is willing to be committed to and involved in something larger than himself will grow beyond the individual whose only motivation is that of self-interest. This is a profound notion, difficult to grasp in its entirety. An Aikido master demonstrated this concept for me many years ago when he asked me to straighten my arm out in front of me and hold it so that he could not make it bend at the elbow. Being a much larger person than I was, he easily bent my arm. The master then asked me to extend my arm again, but this time I should imagine my arm connected to a wall six feet away. I put my arm out and threw my consciousness into the wall. I dove into a kind of silence that blurred the edges of my vision. Suddenly, this six-foot man could not bend my arm even slightly. This experience, and others like it, suggests to me that perhaps this “focus” that Csikszentmihalyi refers to goes beyond what we usually mean by “paying attention.” Perhaps we must “throw our consciousness” into our activity to the point that the edges of our vision are blurred and not be self-conscious, even if we tried (see Millman).

The fourth rule is to learn to enjoy immediate experience or the “here and now.” This behavior is a natural outcome of the three preceding rules if one is determined and disciplined. Enjoying the present moment as an autotelic self demands that there be goals, immersion, and focus, not just a simple letting go of responsibilities. One must be able to “develop skills that stretch capacities [. . .]. Flow drives individuals to creativity and outstanding achievement” (Csikszentmihalyi 213). According to Csikszentmihalyi, the ultimate goal is to create a life of optimal experience in which one may create flow experiences at will, linking these experiences to a larger, more meaningful philosophy of life.

This last guideline requires the individual to enjoy being in flow while at the same time using determination and discipline to find flow. The fact that one must use significant effort to achieve flow seems to contradict the whole idea of being “in flow.” The word “flow” implies “effortlessness,” and yet Csikszentmihalyi seems to indicate that achieving flow requires effort. From this seemingly contradictory statement, we can understand that flow occurs under the right conditions and that we can manipulate those conditions actively to create flow. Where people may normally only achieve a sense of flow infrequently, they may, if they desire, reach this state more often with a disciplined effort. Just as I threw my consciousness into and merged with the wall, so can anyone blend with an absorbing activity if they commit energy to doing so. Writers surely do this as they are writing (Elbow; Fleckenstein “Mental Imagery”; Gallehr; Perl). This understanding brings us hope that, with the correctly applied understanding and concepts, a teacher can actively encourage flow in her students and create a centered classroom.

### Some Principles of the Dialectic

The guidelines for controlling and creating flow explored above give us some important clues as to how to promote flow and a feeling of transcendence within the classroom dialectic between teacher and students. Creating a center in the classroom rests on many conditions that we may not even know exist. However, following Fleckenstein, I accept the premise that finding a spiritual center means

finding the ordering principles of a culture and individual that create significance and allow for the integration of the mind and body. In addition, as Morris Berman argues, in order to gain access to these principles, we must develop a “participating consciousness,” a state of being which involves re-conceptualizing the self as neither fragmented nor historically determined (qtd. in Fleckenstein “Creating” 32). Instead, we identify with the other with no projected purpose in mind but to understand and empathize; the act of participation creates centering in us as we discover the “selfother,” that part of us that exists in relation to others and allows us to experience a heightened awareness of ourselves (32).

This concept of participating consciousness finds an echo in Csikszentmihalyi’s third rule of focusing. As he observed, with focus, the individual becomes stronger and grows beyond his current level of complexity. However, we also know through Csikszentmihalyi that this is only one part of the flow experience; there must also be goals, investment, and enjoyment for it all to come together. Centering in and of itself does not lead to achievement; there must also be a goal and investment.

How should we think of the goal and investment in the classroom? Parker Palmer gives us a profound answer: we search to know the subject *in the community of truth*. For Palmer, “truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline” (104). Teacher and students interrelate in their search for knowledge in a “dynamic conversation of a community that keeps testing old conclusions and coming into new ones” (104). The investment that we make in our learning is guided by a passion, a *love* for the subject. It is the love for our subject and our students that keeps us involved in “things that matter” (104).

Dominique Barbier captures this notion for riders by describing the attitude that a rider must have to ride well: “an open, analytical, unconditionally accepting attitude is necessary, with no room for anger or a sense of superiority” (13). She goes on to say,

90% of riding is mental, allowing the horse to move and perform for and of himself [. . .]. Riding itself is not difficult. Using the mind, however, can be difficult if you are not accustomed to applying it as an aid in riding. Nor can you train without love. This will sound airy, perhaps, but only deep love and understanding coordinated with refined tact will give you positive results with horses. (xiii-xiv)

Superb riding is thus not a matter of controlling an animal and forcing it to do something. Instead, it is a matter of the horse-rider pair understanding each other and working together for the pleasure of doing so. Of course, one must have the complicity of the horse; unwillingness to join the *pas de deux* always indicates an underlying problem that must be addressed.

So what might be this dialectic that enables teachers and students to communicate in a centered classroom? Based on my experiential knowledge from training a horse in dressage, I have isolated five principles that help us to create an understanding of this “conversation.” These guidelines were chosen because, of all the various overlap that exists between teaching humans and teaching horses,

these principles seem to be explicit only in the horse world and thus may bring into clearer perspective the insights that I have transported from the horse world into the classroom to create flow.

### *Principle One: Center Yourself First*

A rider must be relaxed, calm, and aware of her center. Otherwise, the horse, being naturally a little crooked and unbalanced physically, especially with a rider on its back, will throw the rider off-balance, making it difficult to ride well. How does one maintain a feel for the center? A number of physical sensations are attached to being centered, such as the feel of the seat bones on the saddle or the way the elbows seem to drop into the hips. The “elbow” feeling is what I have felt while in front of a classroom, but I suspect that different people have different ways of feeling their center.

By keeping a balanced position in the saddle with a gentle feel on the reins, the rider is able to truly influence how the horse moves, and, if the horse spooks or jumps, the rider will stay with the horse because their center is one. The horse is “in your hands.” This sensation can only happen when the rider is relaxed yet strong and aware of where her center is located. If the rider is tense in any way, this will stop the flow of communication, and she will not be able to feel what the horse is communicating to her.

Lad Tobin reminds us that the teacher is still the center of a “de-centered” (i.e., not teacher-centered) classroom (20); the teacher is the one to organize and develop directions for learning, even if particular topics come from the students. Thus, when teachers use a student-centered, collaborative approach to teaching, they must be centered within themselves just like the rider. Otherwise, students may pull the course off track. When all the students are engaged and working in the moment, the classroom comes alive with their energy. This is when they “come into your hands,” the moment when the goals of students and teacher coincide and they are all focused and invested in what they are doing.

What does it take for students to feel invested, focused, and centered in the class? Teachers ask this question every day, straining their resources to find ways to motivate and excite students about learning. And, no matter how centered a teacher is, if the student does not invest in his learning, flow will be difficult, if not impossible, to establish. This question of investment troubled me a great deal this semester as I faced an experimental section of Foundations of Inquiry, the required freshman-year critical thinking course at Illinois State University. All of the students in my class had failed Foundations of Inquiry the previous semester.

As a way to understand these students, I asked them to write mission statements: what they valued, how they saw themselves, what they wanted to do with their lives. Even though the sample was small, the results are interesting. One might think that an eighteen-year-old student trying to establish a university career would be most interested in learning, improving skills, and getting good grades, or just basically getting an education. Although these goals were mentioned by various individuals, by far the most important goals cited related to connecting to other people. As shown below, over half of the students said that what was most important to them was helping others and valuing their friends and family.

*Table 1: Main Themes of Mission Statements  
for 16 Freshmen at Illinois State University*

To value friends and family	11
To help people	9
To be a leader or teacher (to be looked up to)	5
To reach my potential; to live life to the fullest	4
To find happiness	3
To be honest	3
To learn	3
Concrete goals (get a great job, have a family)	3
To be responsible	2
To listen	2
To succeed this semester	2
To understand the meaning of my life	1
To express feelings	1
To be strong and independent	1

In discussing these observations with the students, I noted that they seemed to value connection a great deal and asked if they felt connected to those around them. We then talked about the stress of trying to be successful, and I showed them how strength comes not from brittle, overly focused trying, but from relaxation and connection. I demonstrated for them the “arm into the wall” exercise described earlier. This concrete, physical demonstration captured their attention quite effectively. In this way, I encouraged students to gather strength through connection and collaboration with those around them, both faculty and students (Chickering and Gamson). Students are seeking connection and are willing to invest in this connection if they understand its relevance to their lives. This knowledge provides a key for teachers in their search to create flow with their students.

### *Principle Two: Walk Past the Fear*

Many situations create opportunity for fear and anxiety, and this must certainly be one of the primary deterrents of flow. In a situation where my horse is nervous or afraid, I have learned to ask where I want the energy to go. With horses, the direction of flow is almost always “forward.” Even a correct reverse maintains a sense of “forward.” With this answer, the rider must look to where she is going and ease the horse’s mind by remaining calm and centered and by encouraging movement in a forward direction without heading directly for the object creating the fear. If the rider is looking constantly at the horse’s ears, the horse senses that the rider does not know where the two of them are going and

becomes tense. The horse's tension is then thrown back to the rider, who becomes tense as well. However, if the rider looks out to where the pair is going, the horse gains confidence, and worry fades. Flow may be regained by retaining forward motion.

The direction of flow in the classroom is obviously not so simple. Learning to write is often accompanied by anxiety, for example, and teachers have many ways of supporting students as they hesitate to move forward. The key is that students continue to write. An example of how this concept might be applied to teachers in the classroom is suggested by what happens when a teacher develops a new course for a new student population that she does not know well. If the teacher does not have a clear idea of what is to be learned and how to teach it, she will probably ignore the students or study them too closely. Predictably, when the teacher concentrates too single-mindedly on students and loses sight of her goals, the pacing slows, and students become disruptive. The teacher must keep her objectives in view at all times. This is one reason a new class preparation is so difficult; the teacher may not have clearly developed ideas about where the class is going and how the course will complete the objectives. Thus, the direction of flow is hard to see.

This particular dynamic has been especially apparent in implementing a new General Education Program at my institution. Foundations of Inquiry, the cornerstone course of this program, is an argumentation course for freshmen that also introduces students to the university and academic values and culture. When I first taught this course in its piloting phase, students would say that they had no idea what the course was about, and I had to accept that I was not sending clear messages because the course was ambiguous in my own mind. Six years later, my sense of the course has clarified so that the students may say they don't like the course, but they do know what it is about. In the past year I have twice taught groups of students who were repeating the course. Often their first instructor was teaching Foundations of Inquiry for the first time. One of the more interesting reactions that I see in them as we begin our class is the sense of relief they express as I show them the direction of the course. Their fear is calmed when a determined, centered teacher takes the reins, at least for that day.

### *Principle Three: Signal Before Asking*

This principle expands on the notion of respect. We must have the attention of our students before we can ask them to do something. How we gain attention is the key. In the horse world, the rider uses a half-halt, a very subtle aid applied through the seat of the rider and various muscles in the legs, back, and stomach. The half-halt says, "Wait! I'm going to ask something of you." The effect of the half-halt is to re-balance the energy. The parallel to the half-halt in the classroom comes in many guises. Just as there is a strong half-halt ("whoa, Nelly!") such as using a student's name, there are more subtle ones as well, such as eye gaze, raised eyebrow, or hand gestures. The important contribution of this principle is the understanding that we must have the attention of the student before we can have an influence and that students have their own momentum. We must always respect the energy of the other and ask it gently to join ours. This principle is closely tied to the next one.



### *Principle Four: Create the Space to Move Forward*

This principle is the most difficult to learn; it has taken me years. Essentially, we can often unwittingly block the flow of energy, both physically and emotionally. If the rider holds the reins too tightly, the horse has nowhere for her splendid energy to go; she will remain short-strided and tight-shouldered. If the horse is disobedient or afraid, tightening up on the reins will only make her feel even more claustrophobic. A rider must use appropriate aids to quiet the horse, but *always* release any pressure *before* the horse realizes that the problem is gone. In this way, the horse has the space to move forward on her own and thus feels it was her decision to calm down. Flow can then be quietly re-established.

This is an extremely important insight that is very difficult to master because tension often gets in the way. The prerequisite to its enactment is a gentle, relaxed contact that, without bias, may get stronger and then release immediately *even when it does not feel safe to do so*. If required, the contact will become a series of strengthenings plus release. Anger cannot be part of the equation. The lesson is that, by releasing the pressure just before the horse gives in, the decision to stop the argument is given to the horse and thus gives her confidence, endows a feeling of space and choice, and keeps communication open. The horse does not feel trapped and ridden heavy-handedly and has no reason to get resentful. The rider just asks quietly, “Won’t you join me?”

A classroom example of this dynamic might be a situation I had in Foundations of Inquiry when young university freshmen tended to pack their belongings and even stand up to put on their coats before the class was over. I found myself especially vulnerable when I was working with one of many small groups. Rather than yelling to be heard above the noise, I insisted that everyone be seated to receive directions and announcements. My eyes focused on students still seated, not on the ones being discourteous. Students who were paying attention pressured the rude, inattentive students to sit down. Thus, the class corrected itself, and I did not spend any excess energy on classroom management. The students in ensuing, similar situations corrected themselves faster and faster, and it quickly became a non-issue. Trust was being built on both sides.

### *Principle Five: Move Toward Self Carriage*

In any class, an area of major concern for new teachers is how to grade and correct mistakes. We often forget that, in fact, learning requires making mistakes; mistakes are part of the flow process. If a horse is held so tightly that it cannot move other than how it is told, not only will there be tension, but also the horse will never learn to move better *without* support. The goal in dressage is for the horse to carry itself, or “self-carriage,” a state where the horse has learned to move with strength, confidence, and grace on its own. It is only with self-carriage that a horse may truly dance with the rider.

This concept captures the idea that students should take responsibility for their actions, building the cognitive skills to exhibit true learning. Only by making mistakes can students know that they have made wrong hypotheses. Moreover, the teacher cannot correct all mistakes, but can only point out to students when mistakes have been made. If students are actively learning, they will refor-

mulate their hypothesis and eventually figure it out. Of course, if students are distracted and not paying attention, the teacher must go back to the start and regain the students' attention, something that teachers, and riders, spend quite a bit of time doing. The teacher cannot create the energy for students to achieve learning. The teacher can only create an environment where the students' energy will naturally flow to the next level of learning. We create the space through which energy is invited to surge. This act involves timing, a generous and non-judgmental spirit, and an incredibly supple, connected awareness of student insecurities and curiosity.

### Towards an Exploratory Pedagogy

Exploratory pedagogy is what Fleckenstein describes as a pedagogy that draws on non-traditional types of input such as imagery, visualization, somatic experience, meditation, koans, felt sense. To this list of activities and approaches, we must add the means to get there. This paper has been an attempt to flesh out the dialectic component of exploratory pedagogy; how we develop our attitude and the conversation with students in the classroom is just as important as the type of activities that we might use to enable discovery. Only then can we find a "center that holds." ☺

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# Connecting

## Section Editor's Message

I am writing this first introduction for "Connecting" on April 20, the second anniversary of Columbine. Just months ago, the shootings at Santana High School in California spread a coat of fresh pain over Columbine with more of the same spattering across the nation. These renewed reminders of alienation in our schools press us to what Parker Palmer calls the "mystery of relatedness" (*To Know* 121).

I cannot forget the AEPL workshop at NCTE in 1999 after Columbine when Carol Sullivan, from a nearby Denver high school, led us through a collaborative exercise in which teachers paired with students who accompanied her. My student (Melissa King, now at U of CO Boulder) and I wrote notes back and forth to each other. I recall my sense of honor and humility when this young woman across the circle was willing to answer my questions and ask hers, to share herself with a teacher she didn't even know. Melissa wrote, "I hope that when I'm an adult I'm not afraid of teenagers. I hope I remember that sometimes you feel lost and that you don't know who you are." I wondered if I was afraid of teenagers. Later in our dialogue, she wrote, "We need to realize that teachers have feelings and brains and lives outside of school." This brief written exchange excited me. What if we could make our classrooms places of deeper connection? What if we could be real people to each other, people with feelings and brains and lives outside of school?

At our 1999 summer conference, teachers sat in a circle in the shadows of the Rocky Mountains. They shared stories, and the excitement was there, too. Again, I felt honored to be a part of the "mystery of relatedness."

Many of the narratives submitted for the opening issue of "Connecting" plumb the "mystery of relatedness." They suggest that we are in the business of *solving* the mystery of relatedness, that we are a *healing profession*. However, these narratives urge us to enter and re-enter that mystery. Palmer tells us that we can only teach ourselves. We give of ourselves, and we receive. As we do, we may discover that we are healers, that we need healing ourselves, that we can heal, and that cycle connects us forever. Laura Milner opens with "Steve's Story," asking a difficult question: what if our healing efforts are harmful? She shows our vulnerability, shows that there will be no guarantees. Candace Walworth's "War & Peace in a Two-Car Garage" turns our attention to Santana High School and the violence of continued alienation. She leaves us with more questions and a more urgent call to answer them personally. "Writing about pain is cathartic," states Dave Waddell in "Caring." Describing what teachers make of this information, he highlights the outcome of "communion of caring among teachers." "Ralph and the Unexpected Fix," Vic Kryston's story, opens up more possibilities and more questions. We hear Palmer's voice echoed again: you can only teach yourself, "at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life" (*Courage* 17). We conclude the first issue of "Connecting" with "The Abraham Dream" by one of the co-founders of AEPL, Richard L. Graves, who discovers that his life is based on a desire to heal.

# Steve's Story

Laura Milner

In those first weeks of English 102, Steve (not his real name) never said much to me or his classmates, in or out of class. His boyish face and muscular arms and legs were sprinkled with red freckles; he was polite, but quiet. I didn't realize that I had prejudged and underestimated him until I read his first essay and saw him cry in class.

The assignment was a timed, handwritten essay on one of two topics, designed to prepare college freshmen for the state-mandated Regents' test. Steve chose "If you could relive one day of your life, what would it be, and why?" and described the day his dad had asked him to skip high school to help move a friend from one house to another. Being a teenager involved in athletics and academics, Steve begged off, so his dad moved the furniture alone. At school that afternoon, Steve received a phone call that his dad had suffered a heart attack while lifting a heavy sofa. On his way to the hospital, Steve turned on his car radio and heard Vince Gill singing "Go Rest High," a bittersweet ballad of a father burying his son. Steve somehow knew, upon hearing Gill's song, that his father was dead. His narrative about the experience was unrelenting, chilling.

A few weeks later, I asked students to bring a meaningful song or poem to class along with two paragraphs illuminating themes and personal connections. We lit a candle on an empty desk in the middle of the room, then worked our way around the circle, hearing everything from "Cat's in the Cradle" and stories of ruined parent-child relationships to Maya Angelou's "And Still I Rise" and the importance of hope in times of struggle. More than one student choked up.

Steve was the last to share; when he pulled out Vince Gill, I felt a mixture of dread and awe. With no introduction, he played the song. Afterwards, when he tried to explain how he had first heard the lyrics on the way to the hospital to see his dying father, his voice broke. He laid his head on his desk and sobbed for what seemed like forever; when I glanced around the circle, blinking back tears, several students were crying. The words of Mary Rose O'Reilley in *Radical Presence* would later resonate: "'Pay attention [. . .] . Don't be thinking about a solution, or how you should fix it. Just listen hard [. . .] .' It's very bad business to invite heartfelt speech and then not listen"(27).

I happened to be sitting beside Steve that day, so I could feel his body heat as he wept. We sat in silence a few moments before I suggested we take a ten-minute break. When the two of us were left alone in the room, I asked if there was anything I could do and praised him for his courage. He didn't say much, but he did stay for the remaining half hour. He came to class a few more times before seeking permission to withdraw from school, even though the deadline had passed.

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His request was granted. His seat in our circle was empty, but his spirit remained.

I worried about him for months, wondering if his classroom breakdown had inflicted more harm than healing. As a practicing Zen Buddhist, I want to avoid causing harm, and sometimes I think composition teachers do more damage than we realize in the name of helping students “improve.” What stories are they longing but reluctant to tell? And what is the price of telling or not telling? Natalie Goldberg says writers return to things they can’t forget, “stories they carry in their bodies waiting to be released” (48). When these stories are silenced or withheld, many students cannot learn and cannot connect.

After worrying about Steve for some time, I was relieved to meet him stocking shelves at Kmart, grateful to hear him say he was okay and back in school. I was even more gratified this semester, three years after the classroom incident, to find him again with an “assistant manager” badge pinned to his pressed, plaid shirt. We chatted about his upcoming graduation and his career options: would it be engineering or retail management? He had never looked stronger or more confident, now taking nineteen hours at the university *and* working fifty hours a week, making the dean’s list *and* being promoted. We didn’t mention his dad.

I left the store feeling glad that Steve’s story had a happy ending, relieved that sharing his experience in class had not ruined his life. I didn’t have the nerve to ask him if or how the writing and/or the telling had changed him. I didn’t have the nerve to hug him, to tell him I remembered and was his biggest fan.

Is Steve the exception? How many students have stories “caught in their throats,” blocking their ability to “participate in the world” (O’Reilly 25)? Those who tell bits and pieces of trauma without fully disclosing still haunt me. They leave me wondering why we don’t spend more time creating what O’Reilly calls the classroom space where “something can rush in, something we did not plan and cannot control” (6). I suspect it is in these spaces where the most life-changing learning occurs, where students and teachers sit together, listening, examining, and listening some more, waiting and watching for what might emerge, forging connections that seem fragile at first and only later solidify into something for life, something to know and remember, like Steve, something to hold and release simultaneously.

## War & Peace in a Two-Car Garage

Candace Walworth

I wasn’t expecting to learn anything from playing war. In fact, I had refused to play war with my nephew until the fifth day of my visit to Illinois, the third day of non-stop rain. By that time I figured that my chances of surviving another game of Monopoly or Shopping Mall were slim. My niece and nephew had already confided to my parents that my attention span for Nintendo was well below average, that I was too slow for Slap Poker, and that I had lost my touch at Ping-

Pong. Mom and Dad were taking naps, and my niece had gone to play with a friend. That left Brody and me. He yelled from the garage, "C'mon, Aunt Candace, let's play military."

I didn't want to because I didn't want to encourage war by playing war. But when I opened the garage door to tell him that I didn't want to play, he was seated at my dad's desk carefully handwriting a memo on blue-lined notebook paper. He furrowed his brow, tucked the piece of paper in an envelope, sealed it, and handed it to me. The brow and the voice, a gradually deepening voice that I could not identify as "his," impressed me.

"Here, Lieutenant Jamison," the voice said.

I opened the note. It read exactly as follows:

Dear, Lieutenant Jamison

You have your assignment now + its rather important. The secretary of State and UN Vice President are going to China. They are going as diplomats. They are going to negotiate to free the 10 pilots. Your mission is to provide armed escort and don't repeat DON'T be afraid to fire. Do not fire though unless fired upon.

Sincerely,

General Buckhimer

I can't say what drew me in more, witnessing his voice deepen in a single sentence or a dim sense that I had been handed an invitation to the inner world of a beloved boy poised at the crossroads between childhood and adolescence. All I know for sure is that I *became* Lieutenant Jamison, and, when a phone call interrupted the game an hour or more later, I had to stretch my imagination to believe I had ever been anyone other than Lieutenant Jamison. For the first time in the five-day visit, I was God, co-God with my nephew, and neither of us seemed to mind sharing. Nothing existed until we breathed life into it. I answered phone calls from Buckhimer & Associates, calculated platoon expenses with gusto, and tapped out messages to General Buckhimer on the clunky Royal typewriter that once accompanied me to college.

It wasn't work, yet it wasn't play either.

While discussing the mission to China over cokes in the canteen, Jamison and Buckhimer looked out the window to see another game underway, one thundercloud tackling another in a giant cloud match. Lieutenant Jamison requested a delay in the mission to China to watch the final quarter of cloud play. After consulting with minor officials by walky talky, General Buckhimer declared, "Request granted. Just remember you can't always have what you want."

According to General Buckhimer, the highlight of the mission came when we finally arrived in China, and he "drove" Grandpa's parked Buick over a treacherous mountain pass. For me, the highlight was the surprise of discovering a dynamic, liberating relationship hidden under the bad words "playing war."

After returning home, I was reading an article by Joanna Macy called "Facing the Violence of Our Times" when a sentence darted in front of me: "I believe

that the experience of never being heard is closely related to committing violence.” The sentence stunned me. Either I didn’t have the ability to imagine it or I didn’t want to imagine it. Never? Not a single encounter with a friendly witness? Not a parent, teacher, cousin, neighbor, or check-out person at King Soopers who waited for a reply to the question, “How are you?” The longer I sat, the more Joanna Macy’s words sunk in. She meant never.

I’m writing from my home in Boulder, Colorado, a three-hour plane ride from my family in Illinois and less than an hour drive from Columbine High School. The word “never” still haunts me.

## Caring

Dave Waddell

It seems appropriate that my story took place at the 1999 Estes Park, Colorado, summer AEPL conference at which the “Connecting” section was conceived. I experienced there an inspiring communion of caring among teachers the likes of which I have not felt before or since.

At the conference, I conducted a workshop that asked participants to read and respond to a numbing paper written by a student I’ll call “Cindy” years before in a university writing class. The paper is about a girlhood experience with sexual assault. Its final lines are both shocking and haunting:

I was mad because I had let it happen to me. I should have ran when  
I heard him coming up behind me. I should have screamed while he  
was leading me to his house. I should have done something. I hate  
myself more than I hate him.

I had a couple of reasons for wanting to lead a workshop built around this paper and its extraordinary ending. First, because I believe that since teachers who are empathic will inevitably receive such trauma-based papers, we should give continuous consideration to *how* we go about responding. And, second, I figured I could learn from the approaches taken by a group of teachers whom I knew to be sensitive to their students’ pain, teachers enlightened and perceptive enough to recognize writing and disclosure as conducive to learning and healing.

After workshop participants read the paper to themselves, they were asked to respond in writing as if Cindy were their own student. In the sharing that followed, most striking was the variety of approaches taken. Some teachers took great care not to step beyond the boundaries of what they considered their proper role as teachers of writing, not to delve into what could be viewed as amateur therapy. Yet, even among the most guarded, there was a sense that not to respond compassionately to such a painful memory was not only inappropriate but inhumane. One response in particular was especially memorable for its unbridled empathy and willingness to be reciprocally personal. The teacher wrote:

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I feel your hurt. I'm reminded of my own childhood demons that arise every once in a while to rekindle my own sense of hatred, self-hatred. Sometimes the only way I have of quieting my own guilt is to get it down on paper, oftentimes in two or three different versions. Then, I begin to feel better; I move the hatred and guilt out of my psyche and put it on paper where I can look at it as a story. I especially like your honesty and willingness to share what has been a haunting memory. Now your healing will begin. Thank you for your courage.

It is well established that writing about one's pain is cathartic. James Pennebaker's research has shown that the disclosure of trauma enhances mental and physical health. It is my further suspicion that for a writing experience to be truly therapeutic, the writer needs to receive from a reader the warmth of genuine understanding and acceptance. It is this empathic role that the careful teacher might sometimes fulfill.

The theme of the Estes Park conference was built upon Sondra Perl's discussion of Eugene Gendlin's theory of "felt sense," defined as something that "happens where writers pause and seem to listen or otherwise react to what is inside of them." One teacher who responded to Cindy's paper described our workshop experience as follows: "I felt a sense of communion in our caring about our student's pain as we seek the proper distance that enables us to best serve each student."

For my part, I left Colorado with a renewed felt sense that our most important work may well take place in the affective realm of teaching.

## Ralph and the Unexpected Fix

Vic Kryston

Some days we gave evaluative feedback. "Class, what grade should I give Ralph so far?" And each person suggested a grade.

"I like how you're going to the library a lot," said Jane, "B!"

"You're interesting to talk to," said Bill, "B."

We did this for everyone, but Ralph's grade really startled him. "This is one hell of a crazy class!" he blurted out. Laughing. Grinning. Happy to have a good grade, perhaps the first one he'd ever earned in English. Feeling sure he was getting away with something. But more than a grade, Ralph was getting a kind of support I don't think he often got. The class said what they liked about him. I suspected that in most classes Ralph only received comments about his mistakes.

As Ralph said, "one hell of a crazy class." Specifically, it was a summer school gathering of people taking high school English. There were these students,

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wonderfully awful at the game of school, whom I had gathered to propose a different way to play school. Each would set his or her own educational goals and be responsible and answerable to the group for achieving those goals.

And I couldn't even be with them most of the time. I had other duties, but I checked into class, staying when needed, suggesting books, viewing a skit, being an audience. I soon grew comfortable with leaving them on their own. They had claimed ownership in some very real ways. They loved this crazy way of going to school, being allowed to learn what they wanted. They didn't want to jeopardize what they had and kept each other in line.

We used the circle to talk about our topics and projects. Keeping in touch with each other's interests made it easier for us to help each other. I was determined that, if nothing else, I would do what I could to establish an atmosphere of help, of caring, of community. Not just for humane reasons: there was no way I could teach twenty different topics. I needed these kids to need and help each other.

"What're you into, Ralph?"

"Um...I'm doing this paper, see..."

"Yeah, what about?"

"Um...well, heroin. You know? Drugs. You know there's a lot of dumb stuff being said about drugs. You know? You hear it all the time. On the radio. About heroin especially. People don't really know about it."

Somebody. Was it me? Or other class members? "How come you're so interested, Ralph?"

"Yeah, Ralph, how do you know so much about it?"

Ralph's usually heavy lidded eyes snapped suddenly open. His voice lost the mocking tone he often affected, grew serious, grew real. "Because I'm hooked, man!"

The room got real quiet. Ralph went on. Telling us about how long, and what it was like, and how he felt trapped, but that how "someday" he was going to do something.

We sat, spellbound. Listening, really listening. Ralph needed listening to just then.

I was worried; not just about Ralph, but about myself. What was the right thing to do? We had no policies written about addiction in our mostly white, mostly middle class, mostly insulated suburbs.

I went for help. The counselor, the school psychologist, and I talked it through. We were in agreement that Ralph should be the one to tell the world, that he needed to face this problem himself. Only that approach could give him access to the integrity he would need to deal with his addiction. Should I or anyone else make Ralph's addiction public, Ralph could just continue to stay dependent, would be less likely to assume responsibility.

The first step had to be telling Ralph's parents, and Ralph had to be the one to tell them. In our next group meeting, I told Ralph I hoped he'd tell his folks about addiction.

"You're kidding, man!"

"They need to know, Ralph," said Bill. Heads nodded all around the circle.

"Yeah, ok," said Ralph, "but it's gonna kill 'em."

"It'll really kill them if you OD, sucker!" someone snapped.

Maybe it was because we had listened to him that Ralph listened to us. "Ok. Ok...will you be there, Kryston?" He looked at me hopefully. I assured him that I would be there.

So I called his parents and set up a conference for the following morning.

Next morning his parents, used to being called, dutifully and resignedly appeared in my office. But that morning the rumor was Ralph was meeting a friend in the parking lot, bound for Canada. I sent the entire class out to find him and carry him back if they had to.

They didn't need to carry him, but they did surround him. They insisted that Ralph turn away from Canada and come back to my office. And this big, hulking, tough teenager found in their caring the strength to return, to face his parents and himself. He broke into tears and confessed. And cried. And begged their forgiveness. And hugged and cried some more. And his parents hugged him back and spoke lovingly of how they'd all face it together. Ralph turned and hugged me once, "You're a great teacher, Kryston."

But I never taught you anything, I thought.

## The Abraham Dream

Richard L. Graves

In May, twelve years ago, I had a dream that changed the direction of my life. It was one of those rare, once-in-a-lifetime dreams which is at once both intriguing and baffling. In the dream a person I hardly knew and had not seen for thirty-five years made a strange appearance. He told me something important, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. For the next few months I tried all kinds of ways to understand what Abraham was telling me. The resolution finally came after a long struggle, a struggle which included writing along with several other efforts. Here is a description of The Abraham Dream:

*A busy street in Tampa. Four lanes of traffic. Cars going in both directions. A small grassy island separates the lanes. The day is usual, warm and balmy. I'm dressed casually, a short-sleeved shirt and slacks.... I start across the street. Halfway across I see him coming toward me, Abraham in his wheelchair, going in the opposite direction.... Once again I see his face, old and unshaven. Glasses make his eyes look large. Brown coat old and shabby, hangs on his shoulders. He looks and smells like a beggar.... We pass, Abraham and I. He turns and says something to me, whispers in my ear. We are at the same level. He is gone. Pulled off into his infinity, I into mine.... Heavy traffic. Noise everywhere. I have to watch for cars. Couldn't hear the words. What were they? I want to hear them. He is gone.*

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It is a shocking experience when someone you have not seen in years appears in a dream. Out of nowhere, or out of somewhere, some mystic place, he appears once again, vivid and real. This was indeed a compelling experience, a strange and unusual visitation. But less than a week later the same dream occurred again, exactly as it was the first time. Abraham was trying to tell me something important, but I couldn't make it out. What was it that Abraham was trying to tell me?

Soon after the dream occurred, I wrote it down to remember as many details as possible. I realized that if I told my family or friends about it, they would worry about me. I knew the journey to find the answer would be a lonely road, but I had to take it. Abraham was telling me something important; I had to know what it was.

The first breakthrough came scarcely a month later at a professional meeting. About five o'clock, at cocktail hour, I was visiting with two close friends. When I mentioned the dream, they encouraged me to talk about it. We were sitting by a large window facing west, looking out over the Bay. They listened. For reasons I still do not understand, it was very difficult to talk about it.

"Perhaps the name Abraham is symbolic," one suggested.

"No, I don't think so," I responded, "I haven't told you the whole story." I realized from our conversation that in order to comprehend the dream, I had to come to terms with the whole story, the time I knew the real Abraham.

The first time I saw him was a Friday evening in the spring, thirty-five years earlier. I was in my early twenties and single. My date and I were on the way to a downtown movie in Tampa, and we passed him. He was in his wheelchair on Franklin Street, selling pencils. He was dressed then the way I saw him in the dream. As we passed him, I sensed a shadow of revulsion pass through my date. I knew then that somehow she and I were different.

During that time I was a member of a large downtown church which sponsored a mission on North Franklin, the skid row section of Tampa. The young people from the church provided the Saturday evening service that Abraham attended. I saw him almost weekly throughout that year.

One Sunday morning something unusual occurred that involved Abraham. Even though he was a regular at the mission, he had never attended the sponsoring church. Several friends and I agreed to help him get there. That Sunday we went over to his apartment to pick him up. While my friends were inside helping him, a bizarre thought crossed my mind. Why not perform a miracle, I asked myself, and just say, "Abraham, walk on down here"? As soon as the thought occurred, I dismissed it. Abraham was paralyzed. To even think such a thing is cruel beyond words.

After that I saw Abraham a half dozen times or so, either at the mission or at his regular corner on Franklin Street. Then, thirty-five years later, he made the unexpected visit to my dream.

Reflecting on that period of my life showed me the overall shape of the dream. The cars and the noisy street represented the pressures and responsibilities of my present life, the work of a university professor, the responsibilities of home and family. Abraham represented a time when I had been more spiritual. If I were ever to understand what Abraham was saying, then I had to find a better balance

in my life, less priority on materialistic success and more opportunities for nurturing my spiritual life.

Later in June I was visiting near Tampa with my family. I considered going back to North Franklin Street to find whether Abraham were still there. "No, I won't do that," I told myself. "The key to understanding the dream is in me. The real Abraham and the Abraham of my dream are two separate people."

Weeks passed and still no resolution. My wife and I had planned a trip to England for early September. For some unexplained reason I had a feeling, or perhaps just a hope, that during the trip I would finally hear what Abraham was telling me. As we planned visits to historic places, I gave the highest priority to Hyde Park Corner on a Sunday afternoon. Listening to those street preachers might remind me of something about the mission on Franklin Street. Maybe something would jar the words loose.

On a Sunday afternoon in early September we were there, my wife and I, moving among the crowd. It seemed so strange. For an hour or so we went from speaker to speaker and listened, but the experience was a disappointing failure. Nothing happened. I didn't know that within two days the long quest would be over.

We visited the little town of Witney, near where I had been stationed in the military service thirty-five years earlier, close to the time I had known Abraham. Several friends and I had attended the Methodist church in Witney. Now I was back again. We went inside, and it was all so familiar, just as it had been years ago, and memories came flooding back. It was cool and dark and quiet inside the church, and I finally heard what Abraham was trying to tell me, what was so difficult for me to comprehend and accept and yet so important. He said only four simple words: "*You are a healer.*"

If the answer came on Tuesday morning in the Methodist Church in Witney, confirmation occurred six days later in Wales, high on a hill overlooking the little town on Llangollen. Once I understood the words of the dream, I began to see how they fit into my life. The words Abraham said to me were like the single missing piece of a puzzle. I realized that all my life, for reasons I can't explain, I have been drawn to situations where people needed help, as though some force had guided me there. At the conscious level I would have denied it or, had someone pointed it out, would have been embarrassed by it. The episode outside Abraham's apartment, for example, was not so much a bizarre thought as it was a wish for his well being. Throughout my life as a teacher, I have been interested in the overall well being of my students as much as their acquisition of factual information. Recently when a friend described a bout of depression, I responded, "Why didn't you call me?" Later, I wondered why I had responded like that, having no clinical knowledge of depression.

In Llangollen that morning the wind was blowing hard out of the west up the valley. We started out early, first going by the school and a scattering of houses on the edge of town, then through a broad meadow, and finally up the hill. The wind was fierce, and rain showers came intermittently. At the top we huddled behind the stone ruins for protection.

But the wind subsided. Far down the valley to the west, high in the clouds overhead, appeared a magnificent double rainbow. It was one thing to hear the

words of the dream but still another to embrace them for myself. On the hill that morning I acknowledged and confirmed that part of myself. “*I am a healer,*” I said quietly, under my breath. The long journey was over—and just beginning. ☺

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## REVIEWS

Anderson, Charles M., and Marian M. MacCurdy, eds. *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.

Lisa Tyler

The first rough drafts of the quarter are in, and already my composition students have submitted drafts about a husband's near-fatal heart attack, a brother's funeral, and a son's survival (with brain damage) after being shot in the head. I am not surprised. After more than 10 years of teaching writing, I know that when prompted to write about a significant event in their lives, many students will choose to write about painful and sometimes nightmarishly traumatic experiences. Many of us who teach writing also know from both personal and secondhand experience the healing power that writing about trauma can have.

*Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* is a hefty anthology of nearly 450 pages even without the index and contributors' notes. The authors of its intelligent, engaging, and sometimes deeply moving essays argue passionately and persuasively for the value of writing in coping with traumatic experience. Co-editor Marian M. MacCurdy opens the work with a brief preface in which—by describing her students' reactions upon her return to the classroom a week after her husband's premature death left her to raise two young children alone—she establishes her credentials as a sufferer of trauma herself, as well as a teacher and writer. In their "Introduction," she and co-editor Charles M. Anderson, who have both been teaching for more than 20 years, place their topic in historical context by first formally defining Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and then arguing for the role of writing in responding to trauma. The weakest point of their introduction is their dubious claim that the national and global traumas we have witnessed via the media have rendered us *all* trauma survivors. Anderson and MacCurdy go on to describe the continuing controversy over the appropriateness and ethics of students voluntarily writing about traumatic events for course assignments but are quick to point out that they are not advocating that students be *required* to write about trauma.

The opening section, "Finding Our Way In," consists of three essays the editors felt "address[ed] issues of how teachers and theorists have come to experience writing as healing and how they have come to practice it" (17). For example, in "Whose Voice Is It Anyway?" Anne Ruggles Gere writes of her struggle to find her own voice as a writer and of the ways in which her voice was formed by the voices of her family and her past. She also describes her efforts to give voice to both her mother, whose language skills deteriorated as the result of a stroke, and her adopted daughter, Cindy, an artist and college student who is working to overcome the lasting effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

In a lengthier essay, grounded in both autobiography and rhetorical theory, Tilly Warnock argues that writing provides us with what Kenneth Burke calls "strategies for coping" and "equipment for living" (36). She believes that both

writing and living are revisionary acts. In a highly accessible essay that draws (lightly) upon the work of Lacan and Derrida, Anderson theorizes trauma writing as a way in which writers negotiate their subject positions, drawing for examples upon two complete essays written by Karen Holt and Patty McGady, students in his advanced expository writing course.

The essays in the book's second section, "Traditions and Extensions," make connections to academic and historical traditions and cutting-edge neuroscience. T.R. Johnson traces the notion of writing as healing through the rhetorical tradition, drawing on the work of Jerome Bruner and Carl Rogers to argue that "the pre-classical, the expressivist, and the postmodern conceptions of the self and of truth imply directly analogous conceptions of writing as healing" (87-88). Michelle Payne analyzes historical accounts of sexual abuse, including one about the molestation of a seven-year-old girl from as early as 1660, another written in 1920 by a Chinese-American whose father raped and beat her, and a manuscript, written between 1788 and 1792, by a New Hampshire mother who suspected her husband of incest. Payne asks her students who write about sexual abuse to draw on research sources to contextualize their experience within a larger social and historical framework; she believes that the papers that result from such work lead the students towards critiquing their society and promoting social change.

In her well-researched essay, MacCurdy offers the collection's most explicit defense of what she calls personal writing (as opposed to academic writing) and buttresses her argument with the latest published research on the neurobiology of trauma. In a complex essay on modern neuroscience, complete with diagrams of the brain, Alice Brand explicates the cognitive biology that underlies the healing power of writing. Citing published books by Gilda Radner, Oliver Sacks, William Styron, Terry Tempest Williams, and Cornelius and Kathryn Ryan, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins explores the ways that writing autobiographies and biographies about illness promotes healing because it fosters the reinterpretation of experience.

The book's third section, "Writing and Healing in the Classroom," focuses on pedagogy. Guy Allen describes the development and evolution of a course in effective writing and offers substantial evidence (including student surveys and case studies) to document his discovery that teaching students to write expressive narratives had extraordinarily positive effects on the expository writing traditionally favored in academia.

Jeffrey Berman and his former student, Jonathan Schiff, write of the benefits of having students keep a weekly journal in an emotionally challenging class on literary suicide. Students were asked to turn in to Berman one diary entry a week, and Berman read selected entries aloud anonymously (with the writer's permission): "A dialogic relationship soon developed in which students commented on their classmates' diaries without knowing each other's identities" (294). Perhaps because in the diary entries reproduced for this essay Schiff only *imagines* that his father committed suicide, this offbeat essay carries less weight than Berman's other (excellent) writings on this subject.

Jerome Bump writes of his attempts to teach emotional literacy in his writing classes, attempts that became increasingly successful until his college reassigned him to classes that were so big that he could no longer teach as he wished.

Drawing on Jungian archetypal theory, Regina Paxton Foehr reports on the salutary results of an innovative exercise in which student teachers identified in writing their greatest fears about teaching, described a worst-case scenario involving their worst fear, and then reframed those fears to discover what their fears reveal about their personal values.

The book's fourth and final segment examines "writing and healing that takes place outside schoolroom walls" (19). In a particularly fascinating essay, Laura Julier reads and analyzes the often heartbreaking texts of T-shirts hand-decorated for the Clothesline Project, which memorializes victims and survivors of violence against women. Emily Nye uses grounded theory to analyze the writings of two Denver-based community groups of people with AIDS. She coded the work of non-professional writers to determine recurring themes, such as anger (at the illness, family, and society), time and "the importance of living in the present moment" (401), and humor as a coping strategy. She found that the shift from private writing to public reading was particularly important in fostering emotional healing. Sandra Florence writes of her experiences teaching a writing group for women struggling with drug abuse, domestic violence, and poverty and gradually comes to realize that her difficulties with these students in part reflect her own discomfort with how much she has in common with them.

This collection joins Carole Deletiner's "Crossing Lines" in *College English*, James Pennebaker's *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others*, and Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing* as part of a growing body of literature substantiating the benefits of writing about trauma: "It transforms stories that have never been told into texts that bear witness to lived experience; it opens confusion and pain to the possibilities of wholeness; and it encourages victims to become agents for personal and public healing" (Anderson and MacCurdy 16). ☐

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Cain, Mary Ann. *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995.

### Fran Claggett

I gave serious thought to writing this review as a dialogue with the author, reflecting the format of nearly half of the book. I got bogged down, however, in attempting to “converse” with the dense, lengthy chapters that set forth her premises and her methodology. In fact, I got bogged down frequently in the early chapters, which are saturated with such sentences as this one: “Despite the fact that many teachers, students, and writers in general are restricted from access to and participation in the discourses by which cultural meanings are inscribed and regulated, social constructivists, taking their cue from postmodern theories of language, often treat change more as a matter of altering language practices than as a matter of social intervention and emancipation” (24).

If the audience for this book is limited to scholarly types who read and write this kind of academic prose, then it probably will reach the readers for whom it was written. There are, however, a goodly number of potential readers who might be intensely interested in her personalized research but are not willing to wade through the academic preamble. To them I would say, “Begin with Chapter Three, ‘Composing Ourselves as Knowers: Women Writers in a Male Tradition’; then, if your appetite has been whetted for the theoretical premises of the research, go back and read the first two chapters after you have finished the book.”

There is a great deal to be said for personalized research about the processes of composing, especially of women composing within a male tradition. In this area, Mary Ann Cain has presented a very thorough look at her own process of composing. She first narrates her experiences of what Carolyn Heilbrun calls “cultural inscriptions” in the composition of a short story. Before we read the entire story, we read how the author constructed her identities “as a writer, student, and woman” and how these identities “were affected by cultural myths informing education and the conflicts they generated.” (69) After we read the extensive narration about the story, we are to read the story. I actually found the narration about the story more intriguing than the story itself, but that is just a personal response.

The next two chapters are, for me, the heart of the book: Cain presents another of her stories (some ten pages) first to a graduate-level fiction workshop, then to a self-directed writing group. In these chapters she reconstructs—from taped discussion, from her own extensive interpretation of that discussion, and from conversations with the other members of the groups—the dialogical experience of the discussions of her story. In the academic class, we have two internalized voices: one, the author of the story, and two, the instructor of the writing class. This presentation is followed by a careful analysis of the talk.

In the self-directed workshop, Cain uses a “trilogue” as well as a “monologue” as the discourses “break in and out of three voices, represented by the three-column format” (126). This is the section that, for me, moves this book from a somewhat strange personal/academic hybrid to a memorable experiment.

Although my responses may not be those which the author intended, I reveled in the poetry of the 26-page trilogy. It actually stands alone as a piece and is, to my mind, infinitely more interesting than the story that is the subject of the re-constructed and interpreted discussion. The reader is treated to such reflections as these:

**We want a conversation,  
different from  
classroom talk,**

reflective of our effort to teach ourselves

Different ways to talk

**We know the kinds  
of talk we crave**

have a different  
rhythm and tempo  
and texture.

yet it is easy to fall  
into old patterns,

**we know what they  
are.**

but not easy to name  
the new ways, only to  
say what they are not.

.....

**Denise keeps talking. "The writing is beautiful.  
The open-endedness is hopeful. How can I talk  
about the potato rock and not say I liked it?  
The connotations in the landscape were  
powerful."**

Careful words. But no  
power to move us.

**listening to listening,  
the shape of shapelessness.  
Swirling in on herself, enfolding  
the merest speck of sound, a  
stray mote to feed her. Flakes of  
skin an irritation in the oyster's  
shell. Vibration in the dissonance.**

**In the silence, spiders  
spin invisible webs;**

Between us, vibrating  
threads capture the  
dance of dust and mi-  
tochondria, binding  
us as

**we fold into ourselves, listening.**  
(130)

Following the workshop “trilogue,” Cain engages in an extensive analysis and comparison of the work of the two groups, carefully coming back to explore her original questions:

What, in fact, is the relationship of models of composing to the “myths of culture,” of institutional arrangements of power and authority? What are the stories that inform our view of the “real world”? Outside the classroom, where we know our students must go, both within and outside of academia? How do these stories affect our view of composing, the instruction we subsequently give, as well as the writing we do ourselves? And how can we, finally, act to change these stories and offer alternative views for ourselves, our students, our field of study? Can we rewrite the history of composing to include “woman” as one who is not only composed but who composes? (18)

While Cain explores the myths of power, using the Persephone story in conjunction with her own story, I’m not sure that the two workshops demonstrate her assertion that “all writers, in a sense, enact Persephone each time they enter their own chaos of meaning making, bringing language to thought and thought to language” (183). She certainly demonstrates her own processes and documents her “inquiry into the paradoxes of institutional inscriptions” placed upon her as “a woman in the academy” (186). One would hope that her inquiry will encourage others to engage in such scrupulous and soul-searching analysis of what we do as we attempt to revision the multiple roles that we take on as writers, as teachers, and as women, both within and without the academy. ☹

Eisler, Riane. *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*. Boulder: Westview P., 2000.

## Bruce Novak

I write in a dark time. It is December of the year 2000. The principles of democracy are being overturned in the name of political expediency. Our nation is severely divided, politically, economically, and morally. It looks as if the only issue on which cooperation between liberals and conservatives can be expected in the near future lies in the further swelling of the wave of politically-initiated educational standards and standardized tests, vaunting the possibility—and, worse, the desirability—of mass-producing minds as we do refrigerators or floppy disks. It seems our national perspectives on learning may be about to disastrously contract.

What better time to take heart from a book from a major world thinker that advances a holistic and practical vision of how a changed notion of education can be the pivotal factor in a systemic re-envisionment of the world we inhabit? Its very title, *Tomorrow's Children*, points us away from the obsession with yesterday's standards and today's technology and towards our desperate need to discover a better model of living for our children than we have yet found for ourselves. Perhaps the main thing standing in our way is our mutually-enforced disbelief that this transformation is really possible.

Riane Eisler concurs with Rudolf Steiner, James Moffett, and others that we need a fundamental shift in our notion of what schools do. She calls for, as Moffett says, "elevating schooling to a spiritual level heretofore unknown in public education" in order "to think now not just about personal success and class mobility but about planetary survival and human co-evolution" (Moffett xii). Eisler goes beyond these thinkers, though, in offering a focused, overarching goal for this transformation: to make the transition from a culture of systemic domination to one of systemic partnership, relinquishing our entrenched insistence on relationships of forceful, top-down control to a faith in the power of mutual nurturance.

This single paradigmatic shift in focus from domination to partnership can renew our hope in our potential to alter the destructive direction in which we are taking our planet—but only when we make this shift holistically, extending it not just in intimate, like-minded partnerships, but also to the economic, institutional, and political partnerships we too often assume are signed over once and for all to the devils of domination.

Near the beginning of the book comes a moving paragraph in which Eisler phrases both the partnership and dominator outlooks in personal terms:

We are all familiar with these two models from our own lives. We know the pain, fear and tension of relations based on domination and submission, on coercion and accommodation, of jockeying for control, of trying to manipulate and cajole when we are unable to express our real feelings and needs, of the miserable, awkward tug of war for that illusory moment of power rather than powerlessness, of our unfulfilled yearning for caring and mutuality, of all the

misery, suffering, and lost lives and potentials that come from these kinds of relations. Most of us have also, at least intermittently, experienced another way of being, one where we feel safe and seen for who we really are, where our essential humanity and that of others shines through, perhaps only for a little while, lifting our hearts and spirits, enfolding us in a sense that the world can after all be right, that we are valued and valuable. (xiv)

For many of us, it is easy to be satisfied with *moments* of seeing and being recognized, with *moments* of clarity within the general psychic fog of our lives of dominating and/or being dominated. To a large extent, we are satisfied with these moments because we are the products of an education that teaches that the world we inhabit is, by and large, an evil place, a place where we will be frustrated, disappointed, perhaps even punished, if we expect too much. Better to burrow within it to make a cozy little nest where we won't be found or to imagine another place we will be taken to if we behave properly. The immense power of the partnership education Eisler espouses in this book is that this idea of the world, of other human beings, perhaps even of ourselves as irredeemably evil, is eradicable. And all we have to do is change the way we think:

Once we understand the cultural, social, and personal configurations of the partnership and dominator models [. . .] [as] systems of belief and social structures that either nurture and support—or inhibit and undermine—equitable, democratic, nonviolent, and caring relations, [we can begin to cure the] pathologies that afflict and distort the human spirit. (xiv)

Eisler's earlier, groundbreaking work *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* is a bold, holistic synthesis of research in archaeology, feminism, and whole systems thinking. It has been called, by anthropologist Ashley Montagu, "the most important book since *The Origin of Species*." Now that Eisler has centered her focus on the issue of education, we see more precisely why her ideas are *that* important. Darwin made the case against *creationism*—against the *neutralizing* idea of the basically inert, fixed, only-once-created nature of the world<sup>1</sup>—by painstakingly presenting the physiological evidence of the gradual evolution of current species from environmentally-adapted varieties of former ones. Eisler makes an equally convincing case against *original sin*—against the *repressive* idea that human beings somehow need to be ashamed of themselves for disturbing the world's inertia with their desires. She does this by painstakingly presenting the historical and archaeological evidence of how this idea came to be acquired and spread; by revealing how it is embedded in the social institutions that exploit women, children, minorities, and the earth; and, most importantly, by outlining how the grip of this idea of irreme-

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that one cannot believe at the same time in evolution and in God. It is possible to see ourselves as co-creators with God, rather than simply as either destroyers or protectors of the Divine Plan. Even Pope John Paul II has recently stated that evolution is "more than a hypothesis" and not inconsistent with belief in a Creator (ctd. in Eisler 60).

diable evil on our collective consciousness can be overcome by our collectively deciding to change systemically the educational institutions through which it is socially instilled. We need to undermine the cultural model of domination and promote the model of partnership at a time in most people's lives when their psychic wholeness is still intact. This single, all-encompassing change in the enculturation of "tomorrow's children" may hold the key to "human happiness, if not survival itself," as Nel Noddings says in her passionate Foreword to *Tomorrow's Children* (xi).

Most of the first part of the book is devoted to explaining the three essential and interrelated components in this educational shift to partnership that will be required if we are to accomplish a more general cultural shift. These are "partnership *process*, partnership *content*, and partnership *structure*: how we teach, what we teach, and what kinds of educational structures we build" (14). Eisler finds a great deal of attention already being given to partnership *process*. It is, however, a serious mistake to imagine that a change in process alone is enough, to imagine that the *how* will eventually take care of the *what*, or—even more importantly—of the *for whom*. We urgently need to expand our perspectives, not just on how learning is conducted, but on the basic subject matters upon which it focuses, and on the all-determining institutional structures within which it takes place.

Most of the second and far longer part of the book takes up the issue of partnership *content*. Here we find its main contribution to educational practice. Parker Palmer has asked, "Why, in our culture, is there so little life-giving power when we use the words *education*, *teaching*, *learning*? Why are these words and the things they point to so flat, so dull, so banal?" (19). Eisler answers this with an awe-inspiring account of natural and human evolution, an account that places the co-creation of human beings, through the processes of teaching and learning in nurturant partnership, at the farthest reaches of the creative expansion of the universe. Perhaps a sentence or two from each of the three chapters will suffice to entice you to read the rest:

This approach does not negate a spiritual dimension in evolution. On the contrary, it shows that the emergence of spirituality—of our human yearning for oneness with other living beings and with what we call the divine—is part of the evolution of consciousness. (60-61)

Since violence is what ultimately maintains dominator relations, as women's and children's human rights are asserted, violence against them has also increased to literally beat them back into submission [. . .]. Precisely because the movement toward partnership is intensifying and deepening—for the first time focusing on the foundational "private" sphere of human relations where we first learn and continually practice either partnership or domination—the resistance to change is stiffening. (127)

One of the difficulties teachers of current events face in a time of backlash is how to teach without being accused of being "too lib-

eral.” “Is this fair?” they are asked. Isn’t fairness the American way? And doesn’t it mean that teachers must counterbalance the “case” for all “liberal” views with the “case” for all “conservative” views? What the partnership educator needs to keep in mind is that, in issue after issue, what is at stake is not liberal or conservative perspectives, but *human* perspectives and the fundamental American perspective of *democracy*. Freedom, peace, and equality are no longer ideological variables to be debated. Rather, they must be the “givens” from which debate is launched—debate as to how they can be better achieved. (193-94)

Eisler touches on one aspect of partnership *structure* in the book’s last chapter, “Living and Learning: Interweaving Student Interests and Concerns,” which deals, in part, with the need to make students co-creators of the curriculum. Perhaps everyone would agree with the statement that “children are our most precious resource.” The question is what *kind* of resource we treat them as: whether we treat them the same way as we currently do most of our natural resources, as material to be mined and exploited in the service of an economy that symbolizes our collective wealth and power, or whether we treat them as co-creators in the growth of the human spirit. It will take another full-length book to formulate a plan of how to change the overall structure of our system of education, and, hence, the overall structure of society, to this end.

Ultimately, it must be said, we will fall short of Eisler’s vision of partnership, in education and elsewhere, unless we can find a partnership *politics*. George Lakoff has posed the problem in these terms:

Women have known throughout history that nurturance is a way of life. Many men have instinctively learned it from their mothers and their nurturant fathers. But the challenge in contemporary America is to create a nurturant society when a significant portion of that society has been raised either by authoritarian or neglectful parents. (378)

We’re back to December 2000, where the threat of “compassionate conservatism,” an ideology of condescending empathy for all those who have not been educated in the severity of dominator morality, looms over the cultural and political horizon. It is fully possible that the *cultural* fundamentalism represented by regressive educational standards and standardized tests may succeed in infiltrating far more minds than religious fundamentalism would ever have swayed. In our hurry to assure that “no child be left behind” in the race for purely material prosperity, we may be putting in ultimate jeopardy the health of the planet and the very process of evolution that has brought forth, one by one, the wonders of plant, animal, and human life—of the biosphere, the zoosphere, and what might be called the “nurturesphere,” the life of consciously co-created experience, of teaching and learning, that characterizes what is best in the human spirit. The triumph of partnership is by no means assured. It remains to be seen whether the human race at this point in history is indeed capable of nurturing itself and the planet upon which it abides, fulfilling the highest potentials of both, or whether

it is destined to be little more than a passing cancer in the history of the earth. So much depends on how far we will be able to expand *everyone's* perspectives on the power of teaching and learning! ☹

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Briggs, Lynn Craigie, and Meg Woolbright, eds. *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.

### Neal Lerner

Should I have been forewarned when my copy of *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center* arrived with its front cover graphic not particularly centered on the page? Well, yes and no. The problem I have with this book is not that it is off center in any way, despite the intent of its editors, Lynn Craigie Briggs and Meg Woolbright. No, the problem I have is that this collection of essays is far too centered, far too like many essays that have attempted to characterize the complexities of writing center work. With a few notable exceptions, the chapters in this book tread what has become the mainstream path of writing center scholarship; the usual names are invoked: Pratt, Bakhtin, Foucault, hooks, North, Cooper, Knoblauch, Miller. Certainly, these scholars are important to understanding the one-to-one work of writing centers, but, unfortunately, this book on the whole gives us very little that is new, fresh, or "off-center." In fact, in writing this review I was reminded of Christina Murphy's critique of another relatively recent collection of writing center scholarship: "Unfortunately, very little new will be found here—most of the ideas explored represent very familiar territory to most writing center practitioners and scholars" (86). Thus, *Stories from the Center* represents a disturbing trend.

Nevertheless, the editors, in their opening chapter, offer up quite a promise for this collection. We are told that its chapters constitute a new form of academic writing: "academic narrative[s]—that tangle story and theory inextrica-



bly” (xii). The editors also contrast academic narrative with what they feel is the dominant discourse of writing center scholarship—“study” discourse or “the distance, measured telling of events” (xi), which is characterized by “other people’s lives, with others’ voices and others’ authorities dominating” (xi). To the editors, most writing center literature “offer[s] simple ‘solutions’ to ‘problems’” (x). Instead, the chapters in this collection are narrative in intent, are “stories” that allow the contributors “to speak things otherwise unspeakable, to give voice to that which would otherwise go unheard” (xi). According to the editors, the genre of this text is “more humanistic, more humane, more ‘fun,’ [as well as] rigorous and truthful. We want to suggest that stories can and should offer insights into theory, thus enlarging our concepts of the field” (xvi).

Most readers of this book will be left scratching their collective heads over this argument. And *Stories* ironically comes at the same time (in terms of publication year) as Cindy Johanek’s criticism of writing center and composition scholarship for being too grounded in narrative or as she says, “the more private worlds of personal stories” (11). Johanek warns us that “while such stories can always help illuminate our work and give meaning to our theory, research, and practice, they, alone, cannot be the primary knowledge-making vehicle that defines our field” (11). Our privileging of the story too often results in an abandonment of multiple ways of examining and understanding our work; knowledge making in the discipline as a whole suffers.

I salute Johanek’s call for multiple ways of exploring writing center work. Nevertheless, I agree with Briggs and Woolbright that the use of rich narrative remains relatively unexplored in writing center research, and that is my primary problem with most of the contributions to this text: generally the chapters were not narrative *enough*, not particularly compelling stories or, more typically, a hint of story packed within a multi-page analysis steeped in critical theory. Perhaps Stephen Davenport Jukuri’s accurate characterization of his chapter—“with tiny strings of theory, I attempt to stitch together a number of writing center stories” (51)—is with a slight adjustment the best way to characterize the majority of these contributions: little strings of story stitched together with a number of theorists’ views (for example, Joseph Janangelo’s discourse on “carnal conferencing” consists of a “story” that is three paragraphs long amid an eight-page chapter). As I note above, quite a few theorists make multiple appearances in the nine chapters, leading me to wonder about the editors’ concern for “others’ authorities dominating” (xi).

Thus, for *JAEPL* readers or anyone looking for non-standard approaches to the complexity of writing center work or just some compelling narrative, this book is sure to disappoint. Perhaps peer tutors and others new to writing center work will find these chapters refreshing, but it seems to me that the form or genre that dominates writing center scholarship is just what most of these contributors offer: an account of a student with whom they worked who “challenged” their assumptions about “good” tutoring or “student-centered” pedagogies or literacy practices of the academy. These brief anecdotes are then followed up with “revelations” of sorts as revealed in the theory and writing of the scholars whose canonical texts fill the reading lists of rhet/comp graduate seminars. There is a certain evangelistic quality to this scholarship, a certain holding up of the lan-

tern so that “others may see what has been revealed to me.” We readers are mere babes with our heretofore simplistic notions of writing center work, misguided in our attempts to “sweep away complexity” as the editors charge, holding fast to our naïve view that when it comes down to tutor and student sitting side-by-side, the detritus of power, authority, and confusion will fall away, and we will engage in real dialogue, real learning that reinforces our belief that writing center work is true, is genuine, is as powerful as, say, compelling stories.

Perhaps there is a strong contingent of practitioners out there, ones who will need the shaking up that this book provides. “Complex work,” they will say, “and I have stories to share, too.” Yes, we all have stories, and I wish that the writers could have provided far more of them in this collection. The work of writing center tutoring is indeed complex, as just about every publication in the last 10 years has shown, either through sustained research, personal narrative, or a combination of both. Collections such as *Writing Center Perspectives*, *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*, and *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers* have explored this complexity and have shown us that literacy work is imbedded in multiple contexts that radiate out from tutor, student, and text in ways both visible and hidden. Tutors bring their own literacy practices and experiences, expectations and assumptions, ideologies and theories to the interaction with students. And tutors are placed within a writing center that is positioned politically within an English department or a composition program or a learning center or within the ways that institutions of higher learning seek to regulate (explicitly and implicitly) the teaching and learning that occurs. Students bring their own sets of assumptions and experiences, as well as the “ghost presence” (to use a concept offered by contributors Michael Blitz and Mark Hulbert) of the classroom instructor. Indeed, it amazes me just how crowded those tutoring rooms can become, how the stories we tell of our work only begin to uncover this complexity, and how difficult teaching writing in writing center settings can be.

A few chapters in this collection do stand out for the ways that they succeed at intertwining narrative and theory, either through particularly compelling narrative or interesting theoretical approaches. Lynn Briggs’ opening chapter, “A Story from the Center about Intertextuality and Incoherence,” describes her work with Mary Ann, a non-traditional student who challenged Briggs to reconsider the “safe” practices she had grown accustomed to as a tutor. Mary Ann did not fit the usual “slots.” As a result, Briggs notes that her “relationship with Mary Ann allowed me to touch the heretofore theoretical intertext, and forced me to abandon any vision of the writer as an individual creating in isolation” (12). While Briggs’ “romantic vision of writing/reading/consulting” seems difficult to imagine these days, given the bulk of the composition and writing center literature decrying such a view, her honesty in presenting herself as naïve, insecure, questioning, and tentative is quite refreshing for the reader, and her rich description of her evolving relationship with Mary Ann offers a model that, unfortunately, few of the other contributors chose to follow.

Another solid contribution is Elizabeth Boquet’s chapter, “Intellectual Tug-of-War: Snapshots of Life in the Center.” As opposed to Briggs’ sustained narrative, Boquet provides brief but compelling “snapshots” of “moments when tutors do things ‘wrong,’ either intentionally or unintentionally” (18). Boquet’s analy-

sis of these moments is always refreshing as she captures the uneasiness that many tutors feel: “I don’t know how I would have done it differently. I only know that I never felt more acutely that I had fallen short of my own ‘ideal’” (22). Boquet resists easy answers or easy theorizing; the result is a chapter that challenges the reader to examine his or her own practices in light of Boquet’s experiences and analyses.

Stephen Jukuri succeeds in similar introspective/reflexive fashion by intertwining brief accounts of particular students or particular sessions with explorations of the ways that the multiple subjectivities of tutor and student are present in any writing center session and any reading of those sessions. The result is a multi-layered narrative and analysis, one that pushes the forms of both narrative writing and academic writing and, perhaps, is the collection’s best realized example of the editors’ offer of “academic narrative.”

There are moments in other chapters that readers may find compelling or insightful or creative (Michael Blitz and Mark Hurlbert’s mix of perspectives, prose, and poetry offers one such example); however, on the whole this collection was a disappointment. When I saw the title, I was hoping that this book would operate just as compelling stories often do, connecting with the reader and offering particular insight into both the commonplace and the complex. Compelling stories do not tell us how to act, but instead show a writer’s or character’s actions and allow us an opportunity for reflection and learning. It’s too bad that more of these chapters did not offer such opportunities. ☹

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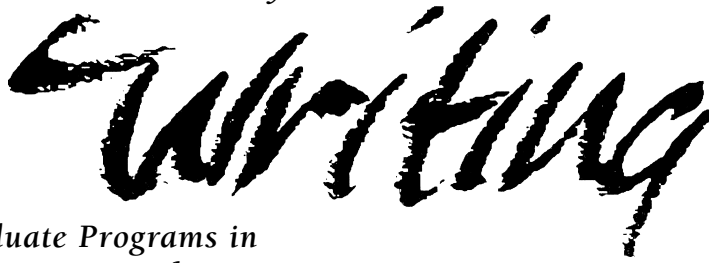
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